

STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To establish Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding the selection, appointment, and movement of Pathways Programs participants in the Internship Program, Recent Graduate Program, and Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing. Revised text is contained in [brackets]. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#). Significant changes include:

- a. Establishes the Pathways Programs policy and procedures in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2, Section C, Paragraph 4 and in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2, Appendix II-N, Pathways Programs.
- b. Establishes a new qualification standard in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2, Appendix II-F4, Pathways Internship Program.
- c. Rescinds VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2, Section C, Paragraphs 4 and 7, covering the Presidential Management Fellows and Senior Presidential Management Fellows and Career Intern Program, respectively.
- d. Changes VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2, Section C, Paragraph 5 entitled “Student Educational Employment” to “Employment of Healthcare Residents, Interns and Trainees.”
- e. Changes VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part I, Chapter 2, Section C entitled “Student Employment Program” to “Student Employment and Healthcare Residents, Interns and Trainees.”
- f. Rescinds VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Appendix D, Sample Bachelor’s Degree Student Career Experience Program Agreement.
- g. Rescinds VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Appendix Q, Presidential Management Fellows Program.
- h. Exempts the Internship and Recent Graduate Programs from time-in-grade restrictions as outlined in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part III, Appendix III-B.
- i. Removes references to the Outstanding Scholar Program and related provisions in VA Handbook 5005.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of Human Resources Management.

4. RESCISSIONS: None.

CERTIFIED BY:

/s/
Dat P. Tran
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Office of Enterprise Integration

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Pamela S. Mitchell
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration

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STAFFING

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*Use in conjunction with the OPM Standard.

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(4) **State Employment Services.** Local offices of the various State employment services are equipped to give advice regarding labor market conditions, publicize position vacancies, and screen and refer applicants. Many of these offices are organized to provide recruitment assistance for professional occupations, as well as for skilled and unskilled workers.

(5) **Outside Recruiting Assistance from Commercial Recruiting Firms and Non-profit Employment Services.** Profit-making commercial recruiting firms and professionally sponsored non-profit employment services are legitimate sources in recruiting for hard-to-fill positions. The services are provided via written contract and typically include publicizing an employer's vacancies and referring resumes of any interested applicants who appear to meet the basic qualification requirements. See 5 CFR 300.401 – 300.408 and Appendix I-A for applicable regulatory and procedural requirements. Participation in professional associations' conventions and meetings, many of which feature on-site placement operations, also often pays recruitment dividends. In addition to these formal approaches, informal contacts with professional associations at the national, regional, State, and local levels are often productive. Line and staff officials can play an important role in recruitment activities of this type.

(6) **Competing Organizations.** Contacts with other Federal, State, county and municipal agencies and private institutions employing the same types of personnel as VA are sometimes productive – not to recruit their staff but to invite referrals of personnel who may have declined their offers or are surplus to their staffing needs.

(7) **Career Days.** Career days, job fairs, and other similar events can serve as productive sources. Such events are sponsored by educational institutions, chambers of commerce, civic groups, and other organizations.

(8) **[Pathways Programs for Students and Recent Graduates].** This source yields [employees] who tend to be more immediately productive as they are already familiar with the working environment of VA or another Federal agency [, as applicable]. (See 5 CFR 213.[3402] (a) and (b) and section C of chapter 2, this part.)

(9) **Allied Health Training.** This source includes VA-funded allied health trainees, such as those established in social work, dietetic and psychology disciplines.

(10) **Normally Unemployed Persons.** Workers in seasonal industries within the local area may be available for off-season work in VA. Also, the possibility may be explored of obtaining services from members of the local population who normally are not employed, such as students, homemakers, and retired persons. Appropriate consideration should be given to establishing part-time positions to capitalize on the skills and motivation of such individuals.

(11) **State Licensing Bodies.** State licensing organizations will often furnish names and addresses of newly licensed individuals who may consider employment with VA.

(12) **Special Interest Groups.** Community action groups, women's organizations, fraternal societies, welfare groups, rehabilitation organizations concerned with training and placement of persons with disabilities, and similar organizations will often provide placement assistance.

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(1) **Utilization and Training.** There are two means through which Federal agencies may provide on-the-job training for disabled Veterans under Chapter 31 authority—as paid employees via a regular appointment and as Chapter 31 unpaid trainees. Chapter 31 unpaid trainees will not replace or be used in lieu of regular employees for whom funds and ceiling have been provided. This training is to be provided on a host-enrollee basis for which an agreement, VA Form 22-1904, Agreement to Train On-the-Job Disabled Veterans, is required. WOC (without compensation) appointments are inappropriate.

(2) **[Noncompetitive] Appointments.** Special emphasis will be directed toward full utilization of the 5 CFR 315.604 [noncompetitive] appointment authority to enhance employment opportunities for disabled Veterans who complete training. Every effort will be made to place Chapter 31 unpaid trainees who successfully complete training. This should include close coordination with Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) rehabilitation and education staffs, referral for employment consideration to other VA facilities, and referral to other Federal agencies if employment opportunities are not available within VA.

c. **General.** Authorities specifically covering appointment and training of Veterans are referred to above. Numerous other hiring or training authorities, while not specifically aimed at the Veteran population, also often prove useful for those Veterans who meet the applicable eligibility requirements. Examples include: the various authorities for appointing persons with disabilities (see 5 CFR, part 213 and part II, chapter 2, section C, this handbook); the time-limited appointment authorities (see 5 CFR, part 316), and part II, chapter 2, section B, this handbook); and such programs as [Pathways Programs] (see 5 CFR, part 213 and part II, chapter 2, section C, this handbook) and VA Alcohol and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation Counseling (see part II, chapter 2, section C, this handbook). See also 5 CFR, part 330, subpart D for information on positions restricted to preference eligibles (custodian; guard; messenger; and elevator operator). In addition, 38 U.S.C. 4214(g) authorizes the Secretary to accord preference for employment in VA of qualified Vietnam era Veterans and certain disabled Veterans as Veterans benefits and psychological readjustment counselors, Veterans claims examiners, outreach personnel, and Veterans' representatives at educational institutions. See also, paragraph 5 of part II, chapter 2.

3. EMPLOYMENT OF VETERANS WITH MEDICAL MILITARY OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

a. **Statutory Basis.** Section 201 of the Veterans Health Care Expansion Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-82) amended section 7302 of title 38, United States Code, which now requires VA to ". . . carry out a major program for the recruitment, training, and employment of Veterans with medical military occupation specialties as (A) physician assistants; (B) expanded-function dental auxiliaries; and (C) other medical technicians . . . [including] measures to advise all such qualified Veterans . . . and members of the armed forces about to be discharged or released from active duty . . . of employment opportunities with the Veterans Health Administration . . ." The phrase "other medical technicians" includes all the positions associated with the direct [healthcare] of patients, as well as research and other medical related professional, technical, and assistant or aid type career fields.

b. **Employment Information.** Recruiting materials for specific occupations are sent to U.S. military discharge centers as part of the initial distribution process, and are also available upon request.

SECTION C. [STUDENT EMPLOYMENT AND HEALTHCARE ADMINISTRATIVE RESIDENTS, INTERNS AND TRAINEES]

1. POLICY

a. All VA establishments are encouraged to participate in the employment of students under the title 5 [Pathways Programs] and under title 38 authorities, especially when such participation will contribute to VA-wide employment objectives or facilitate recruitment for shortage category positions at individual field facilities. Facility use of such student employment features as the title 5 [Pathways Internship Program], which allows [noncompetitive] conversion to competitive positions, is an effective means of furthering equal employment opportunity objectives. Particular attention will be given to providing opportunities for Vietnam era Veterans, disabled Veterans, and students with disabilities. Details on student employment authorities are in part II of this handbook in chapter 2 for title 5 and chapter 3 for title 38.

b. Healthcare facilities will take full advantage of the staffing flexibility offered by VA training programs in healthcare administration by appointing trainees in such programs under the [Pathways Internship Program]. Upon successful completion of the Internship Program, these trainees may be converted to [term,] career-conditional or career appointments, as appropriate.

2. REFERENCES

- a. [5 CFR 213.3402(a)]
- b. 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(D)
- c. [5 CFR, part 362]

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3. SPECIAL NEEDS APPOINTMENTS 5 CFR 213.3102(i)(2)

a. **General.** Facilities may make excepted temporary limited appointments of not to exceed 30 days duration to meet any legitimate special need that cannot be met by another appointment authority. These appointments may be made without regard to the general eligibility requirement in instances when a facility determines there is a critical need to fill a position on an interim basis pending completion of competitive examining, clearances or other procedures required for a longer appointment. Temporary limited appointments of longer duration are not authorized for this purpose.

b. **Extensions.**

(1) Facilities may extend the service of an employee serving under a special needs appointment for up to 30 additional days provided that:

- (a) Continued employment is essential to facility operations;
- (b) The initial appointment was properly made; and
- (c) The conditions which justified the original appointment still exist.

(2) This authority may not be used to exceed a service limitation imposed by some other appointing authority. A facility may not employ an individual under this type of appointment for more than 60 days in any 12-month period.

(3) The action extending a special needs employee's service is processed as a conversion.

4. PATHWAYS PROGRAMS

a. **Purpose.** This paragraph establishes VA policy for implementing the selection, appointment, and movement of Pathways Programs participants in the Internship, Recent Graduate, and Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Programs. On December 27, 2010, Executive Order (E.O.) 13562 established the Internship Program and the Recent Graduates Program and revised and reinvigorated the PMF Program. These two new programs, along with the PMF Program, collectively form the Pathways Programs. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued the final rule for the Pathways Programs on May 11, 2012 (*77 FR 28194*), with an effective date of July 10, 2012. The Pathways Program requirements are found in part 362 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The appointing authorities for the Pathways Programs are found in 5 CFR 213.3402(a), (b), and (c).

b. **Scope.**

(1) **Coverage.** This policy applies to appointments of students and recent graduates in the title 5 excepted service using the Pathways Programs, Schedule D hiring authority. Appointing authorities for the Pathways Programs are found in 5 CFR 213.3402(a), (b), and (c) and part 362. This section replaces Human Resources Management Letter 05-13-01, Implementing the Title 5 Excepted Service Pathways Programs in VA dated January 3, 2013. The Pathways Programs regulations replace the former Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) formerly

covered under 5 CFR 213.3202 and PMF program formerly covered in 5 CFR 213.3102(ii) and (jj) and 5 CFR, part 362.

(2) **Exclusions.** This paragraph does not apply to: enrollees in manpower or education programs hosted at no cost to VA or on a cost reimbursable basis, volunteers, WOC (without compensation) employees, or students enrolled in baccalaureate curricula appointed under authorities other than 5 CFR 213.3402(a), (b) and (c), direct patient care student positions (i.e., interns, residents, and trainees) [appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405], or positions in the title 38 (full or hybrid) excepted service.

c. Policy.

(1) Any programs established under the auspices of this paragraph must comply with the criteria as outlined in the referenced authorities.

(2) Guidance for establishing programs under this authority may be found in Appendix II-N of this part.

d. Responsibilities.

(1) **Assistant Secretary for the Office of Human Resources and Administration (OHRA) (006).** Serves as the designated agency official, as VA's Chief Human Capital Officer, making the decision to enter into a Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

(2) **Dean of VA Learning University (VALU).** Serves as the designated official for administering and managing the Pathways Programs in VA. The Dean of VALU is responsible for designating the Department's VA Pathways Programs Officer (VA PPO) and the VA PMF Coordinator.

(3) **Pathways Program Management Office (PPMO).** Provides governance, administration, management, marketing and support for all Pathways Programs within the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and VA Central Office (VACO). The PPMO serves as the centralized Pathways resource for best practices, standard operating procedures, tools, templates, data analysis, tracking, reporting and systems, and supporting Participants, hiring officials, HR Offices, and other key stakeholders. The PPMO provides support for other stakeholders involved in the Pathways Program.

(4) **VA Pathways Programs Officer (PPO).** The VA PPO is organizationally aligned in the VA Pathways Program Management Office (PPMO) in VALU. The headquarters VA PPO's duties and responsibilities include:

(a) Administers VA's Pathways Programs hiring plan, recruitment, and on-boarding process for VA Pathways Programs Participants, which includes coordinating with VA stakeholder officials, such as the PPOs for the three Administrations and VA Central Office;

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(b) Serves as a liaison with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) by providing updates and reports on VA's implementation of the Pathways Programs and the number of individuals hired and converted; clarifying technical or programmatic issues, sharing VA best practices; and conducting periodic audits to ensure program compliance;

(c) Provides technical guidance and advice to Administration PPOs, hiring officials, supervisors, and operating human resources officials on the provisions of the Pathways Programs;

(d) Coordinates and submits the Departmental Pathways MOU to OPM no less frequently than every 2 years;

(e) Coordinates and submits reports and other updates to OPM and VA senior officials, as requested;

(f) Coordinates and submits requests for Recent Graduates programs lasting more than one year to OPM for approval;

(g) Designs and implements guidance for an on-boarding process for each Pathways Program;

(h) Develops approval criteria for granting extensions and approving/denying requests for extension of appointment of Recent Graduate and PMF Programs Participants up to an additional 120 day to cover rare and unusual circumstances or situations other than a major reorganization, base closing, or an agency wide restructuring;

(i) Adjudicates requests for credit or waiver of service hours for Internship Program Participants;

(j) Works with the VA PMF Coordinator, Administration PPOs, and Administration PMF Coordinators, and other VA Key Stakeholders to plan program budgets and to project the number of PMF hires in the Department; and

(k) Monitors and tracks outreach activities to determine their overall effectiveness in recruiting quality applicants.

(5) **VA PMF Coordinator.** The VA PMF Coordinator is organizationally aligned in VALU. The VA PMF Coordinator's duties and responsibilities include:

(a) Administers the VA PMF Program and serving as the VA PMF Program liaison with OPM;

(b) Manages the placement of PMFs within VA, which includes: recruitment (posting job opportunity announcements to the OPM PMF portal); ensuring that Veterans' preference is applied before providing eligible PMF candidates to the hiring official; and developing other Program-related activities of PMFs appointed in VA staff offices;

(c) Works with the Administration PPOs and Administration PMF Coordinators designated for NCA, VBA, VHA and VACO to ensure accomplishment of comparable matters for those Administrations, including required assignment of mentors and creation of approved IDPs, and required developmental assignment;

(d) Collaborates with the hiring official or supervisor to ensure a mentor is assigned to the PMF, to ensure 80 hours of formal interactive training per year are completed by the PMF that fully addresses the competencies outline in the PMF's IDP, and to ensure that the PMF completes the 4-6 month developmental assignment;

(e) Reviews and recommends approval/disapproval to the Dean of VALU petitions for readmission and reappointment of a PMF who withdrew from the program; and

(f) Coordinates the submission of each Fellow's certification of completion through VA's Executive Resources Board (ERB).

(6) Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) (05).

(a) Establishes and maintains VA policy and guidelines for the implementation and utilization of the Pathways Programs;

(b) Provides technical guidance and advice to the VA HR community regarding the policy related to the Pathways Programs; and

(c) Reviews and submits, to OPM, facility requests for pass over of 30% or more service connected disabled Veterans in relation to Pathways recruitment actions for Internship Program positions and non-*Luevano Consent Decree* covered Recent Graduates Program positions.

(7) Administration Pathways Program Officers (PPO). Administration PPOs provide program guidance on all Pathways Program-related decisions at the administration level including VHA, VBA, NCA and VACO. The Administrations PPOs duties and responsibilities include:

(a) Coordinates the Pathways Programs hiring plan and Pathways-related reporting input for their designated Administration;

(b) Oversees the recruitment and on-boarding process for Participants within the Administration;

(c) Provides technical guidance and advice to hiring officials, supervisors, facility-level Pathways Program Coordinators and operating human resources officials within the respective Administration regarding the Pathways Programs;

(d) In concert with the headquarters VA PPO and VA PMF Coordinator, ensures the assignment of mentors and creation of approved IDPs for Recent Graduates and PMFs assigned to the respective Administration;

(e) Reviews and makes determinations for crediting comparable experience acquired by an Intern in a non-Federal or student volunteer service program;

(f) Advises on requests for breaks in program for Internship Program Participants during periods of absences; and

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(g) As applicable, provides copies of Administration-wide programs (i.e., VHA's Technical Career Field Program), incorporating the use of Pathways Programs, to OHRM (05) prior to implementation. Any programs implemented under this authority must comply with the provisions of this part.

(8) Human Resources (HR) Officer/Director.

(a) HR Officer/Director, or designee, have responsibilities that run parallel to those of the Administration's PPO in the organizations for which her/his staff provides HR services. The HR Officer/Director may designate technical responsibility of the Pathways Programs to a HR Specialist with extensive knowledge of federal staffing regulations and procedures. However, the HR Officer/Director is ultimately responsible for oversight of the designee and overall compliance of the Program at the facility. The HR Officer's/Director's duties and responsibilities include:

(b) Serves as the facility-level Pathways Programs Coordinator and ensures the Pathways Programs complies with the provisions in this section, 5 CFR 213.3402 and part 362;

(c) Participates in local workforce planning efforts to ensure permanent placement opportunities are available for Pathways Participants converting to the competitive service;

(d) Provides technical guidance and advice to hiring officials, supervisors, and operating human resources staff within the respective facility regarding the Pathways Programs;

(e) Advises hiring officials and supervisors in the design and development of formal training plans, individual development plans (IDPs), Participant Agreements, performance plans, mentoring, and the on-boarding requirements;

(f) Ensures proper application of Veterans' preference when filling Pathways positions, excluding PMF Program positions. PMF Program positions are adjudicated for Veterans' preference by the VA PPO prior to providing the certificate of eligibles to the HR office or hiring manager;

(g) Makes qualification determinations for appointments in the VA Pathway Internship and Recent Graduates Programs and for PMF appointments at the GS-11 or GS-12 grade level. OPM makes qualification determinations for PMF Finalists at the GS-9 grade level;

(h) Serves as a liaison with participating schools on matters pertaining to student employment programs in VA and stays informed of developments in the area of student employment both in the public and private sectors;

(i) Ensures hiring officials and supervisors comply timely to the mandatory requirements of each Pathways Program, including but not limited to, issuing performance standards, executing Pathways Participant Agreements, creating individual development plans (IDPs), assigning mentors, etc. Identifies expectations and other mandatory requirements in accordance with 5 CFR 362.106;

(j) Obtains certification of enrollment and recurring transcripts from Interns as proof of satisfactorily seeking a degree (diploma, certificate, etc.) in a qualifying educational institution, on a full or half-time basis (as defined by the institution in which the student is enrolled);

(k) Submits reports and other updates regarding the hiring and conversion upon request to the headquarters VA PPO through the respective Administration's PPO;

(l) Adheres to Pathways Programs hiring projections reported for the respective facility and reports deviations to the headquarters VA PPO through the respective Administration PPO;

(m) For consideration of crediting waiver of service credit for conversion to the competitive service, makes the determination that Intern's work experience demonstrates high potential by outstanding academic achievement and exceptional job performance under an Internship Program appointment; and

(n) Advises hiring officials and supervisors of their duties and responsibilities as defined in paragraph 9 of this chapter.

(9) **Hiring Officials and Supervisors.** The Hiring Official and Supervisor's duties and responsibilities include:

(a) Supervises daily work activities of the Pathways Participant and serves as the Pathways Participant's primary point of contact for any questions related to the program;

(b) Adheres to all requirements of the applicable Pathways Program for each Pathways Participant, including all of the provisions in the governing Participant Agreement, along with providing a meaningful on-boarding process. The hiring official and/or supervisor is responsible for orienting the Participant to VA's mission and the Participant's role in that specific facility and ensuring access to all necessary technological and program resources; providing ample work; career guidance; and regular performance feedback throughout the Program;

(c) Establishes performance elements and standards directly related to acquiring and demonstrating the various leadership, technical, and/or general competencies expected of the Participant, as well as, the elements and standards established for the assigned duties. VA Handbook 5013, Performance Management Systems, Part I - Title 5 Performance Appraisal Program, does not require a formally established performance plan for temporary title 5 excepted service employees expected to work 90 calendar days or less in a 12-month period, e.g., a Pathways Intern hired for the summer with a corresponding not-to-exceed date. Participant Agreements must include performance expectations;

(d) Designs and develops formal training plans, Participant Agreements, and performance plans for Participants with advice from the HR Officer/Director or designee;

(e) Assigns duties and responsibilities to Internship Participants that are consistent with their educational background and career interests and purpose of appointment;

(f) In coordination with workforce planners, ensures that an adequate number of permanent positions will be available to convert Pathways Participants who successfully complete their Program;

(g) Ensures Recent Graduate and PMF Participants are assigned an appropriate mentor;

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(h) Ensures Participant Agreement is established within 10 calendar days of the appointment date and a copy is provided to the Participant and the servicing Human Resources Office;

(i) Verifies enrollment and eligibility of a Participant for continued participation in the Internship Program;

(j) Communicates to Participants all program requirements as related to conversion eligibility, special training requirements, and establishes a mutually agreeable work schedule; and

(k) Review, for approval or denial, an Internship Program Participant's request for a break in program.

(10) Internship Program Participant.

(a) Adhere to the Internship Program requirements required by Federal regulation and VA policy.

(b) Meet the definition of a "student" as defined in 5 CFR 362.202 as an individual accepted for enrollment or enrolled and seeking a degree (diploma, certificate, etc.) in a qualifying educational institution, on a full or half-time basis (as defined by the institution in which the student is enrolled), including awardees of the Harry S. Truman Foundation Scholarship Program under Public Law 93–842. Students need not be in actual physical attendance, so long as all other requirements are met. An individual who needs to complete less than the equivalent of half an academic vocational or technical course-load immediately prior to graduating is still considered a student for purposes of this Program.

(c) Provide proof of enrollment in a qualifying educational institution and academic transcripts at the end of each academic period and upon request.

(d) As applicable, at the time of appointment and upon request, demonstrate an acceptable overall Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) of at least a 2.0 or above on a 4.0 scale, as recorded on the official transcript.

(e) Adhere to an established work schedule approved by the supervisor.

(f) Perform, successfully, the duties and responsibilities in the assigned position description.

(g) Observe all workplace rules, such as dress code, office conduct and behavior.

(h) Participate in all VA mandatory training programs (either on-line or in the classroom).

(i) For individuals appointed in Intern positions (without time limit) expected to last 1 year or longer, establish an IDP with the assistance of the supervisor. The IDP must be executed within 45 calendar days from the appointment date, and must be established in concert with the assignment of performance requirements, as applicable.

(j) Notify the supervisor of any changes in the completion of the educational program, such as graduation date, changes in the major degree requirements, or changes in the educational institution's accreditation.

(k) Submit requests for breaks in program to the supervisor within a timely manner.

(11) Recent Graduates Participant.

(a) Adhere to the Recent Graduate Program requirements required by Federal regulation and the VA policy.

(b) Adhere to an established work schedule approved by the supervisor.

(c) Perform, successfully, the duties and responsibilities in the assigned position description.

(d) Observe all workplace rules, such as dress code, office conduct and behavior.

(e) Establish an IDP with the assistance of the supervisor. The IDP must be completed within 45 calendar days of appointment and include a plan to obtain at least 40 hours of formal interactive training, and must be established each year in concert with the assignment of performance requirements.

(f) Collaborate with the supervisor to identify a mentor within 90 calendar days of the appointment date.

(g) Participate in all VA mandatory training programs (either on-line or in the classroom).

(h) Attend regularly scheduled meetings with designated mentor.

(12) Presidential Management Fellows Program Participant.

(a) Adhere to the PMF Program requirements required by Federal regulation and the VA policy.

(b) Adhere to an established work schedule approved by the supervisor.

(c) Perform, successfully, the duties and responsibilities in the assigned position description.

(d) Observe all workplace rules, such as dress code and office conduct and behavior.

(e) Establish an IDP with assistance of the supervisor. The IDP must be completed within 45 calendar days of appointment and include a plan to obtain at least 80 hours of formal interactive training per year, and must be established each year in concert with the establishment of the performance requirements.

(f) Collaborate with the supervisor to identify a mentor within 90 calendar days from the appointment date and attend regularly scheduled meetings with designated mentor.

(g) Participate in a VA mandatory training programs (on-line and classroom).

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(h) Complete a 4-6 month developmental assignment as described in 5 CFR 362.405(b)(4).

e. **References.**

(1) Title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.), 2108, Veteran; Disabled Veteran; Preference Eligible

(2) Title 5, U.S.C. 2301, Merit Systems Principles

(3) Title 5, U.S.C. 2302, Prohibited Personnel Practices

(4) Executive Order (E.O.) 13562, Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates, December 30, 2010

(5) Title 5, CFR, 213.3402, Schedule D Entire Executive Civil Service; Pathways Programs

(6) Title 5, CFR, part 302, Employment in the Excepted Service

(7) Title 5, CFR, part 310, Employment of Relatives

(8) Title 5, CFR, part 362, Pathways Programs

(9) Office of Personnel Management, Memorandum for Chief Human Capital Officers, Use of Third-Party Intern Providers, dated October 19, 2012

(10) Office of Personnel Management, Pathways - Transition and Implementation Guidance, July 2012

(11) Office of Personnel Management, Pathways for Students and Recent Graduates, Questions and Answers, October 2014

f. **Definitions.** For the purposes of this policy, definitions are as follows:

(1) **Academic Year of Undergraduate Education.** Thirty (30) semester hours, 45 quarter hours, or the equivalent in an accredited college or university.

(2) **Advanced Degree.** A professional or graduate degree, e.g., master's, MBA, Ph.D., J.D.

(3) **Agency.** An Executive department. For the purpose of this policy agency means Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

(4) **Break In the Program.** A period of time when an Intern is working but is unable to go to school, or is neither attending classes nor working for the Department.

(5) **Certificate Program.** A post-secondary education, in a qualifying educational institution, equivalent to at least one academic year of full-time study that is part of an accredited college-level, technical, trade, vocational, or business school curriculum. Certificate programs may not be used to

appoint individuals enrolled in short term “certificate programs” that are not required for the position employed or which lack sufficient academic rigor.

(6) **Exceptional Job Performance.** A formal evaluation conducted by the student's Internship supervisor, consistent with the applicable performance appraisal program that results in a rating of record (or summary rating) of higher than fully successful or equivalent.

(7) **Executive Resources Board (ERB)** (applies to PMFs). Senior officials who have been given responsibility for executive resources management and oversight by the agency head. The individual(s) review PMF Fellows’ conversion packages and certify whether PMF Fellows have successfully completed Program requirements. These senior officials have been given responsibility for executive resources management, merit staffing and oversight by the Secretary of VA.

(8) **Extension of Program.** An agency may extend the Recent Graduate or PMF Program for a Participant for a period for up to an additional 120 calendar days to cover rare, unusual circumstances or situations. These circumstances and situations are outlined in the VA-OPM Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Also, see the definition of Memorandum of Understanding. Extensions of the program are approved by the headquarters VA PPO.

(9) **Individual Development Plan (IDP).** A formal written document (sometimes called a professional development plan) that outlines how a Participant will improve current performance and/or meet future anticipated performance requirements and career aspirations. An IDP is a tool that guides development through formal training, education or certification from a college or university, on-the-job experiences, or coaching and mentoring. Participants in the Recent Graduates and PMF Programs are required to be assigned IDPs within 45 calendar days of appointment. Supervisors of participants appointed in Internship Program positions (without time limits) expected to last more than 1 year should assign Participants an IDP within 45 calendar days of appointment.

(10) **Initial Appointment.** An individual’s first Pathways appointment in any particular agency/department.

(11) **Internship Program Participant or Intern.** An Internship Program Participant or Intern is an eligible student, as defined in 5 CFR 362.202, who is participating in the Internship Program. Interns may serve on temporary appointments not to exceed 1 year and are referred to as temporary Interns. Those students serving on appointments without a not-to-exceed date are referred to as indefinite Interns.

(12) **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** A formal bilateral or multilateral agreement between two or more parties that expresses a convergence of will between the parties, indicating an intended common line of action. The Pathways Programs MOU is established between OPM and the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Human Resources and Administration (006) in VA Central Office.

(13) **Outstanding Academic Achievement.** A student in the Internship Program who possesses an overall grade point average (G.P.A.) of 3.5 or better, on a 4.0 scale; standing in the top 10 percent of the student's graduating class; and/or induction into a nationally-recognized scholastic honor society.

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(14) **Participant Agreement.** A written agreement between VA and each Pathways Participant. The agreement must clearly identify expectations, including but not limited to: responsibilities of Pathways Participant and the Supervisor; a general description of duties; work schedules; the length of the appointment and termination date; mentorship opportunities; training requirements, as applicable; evaluation procedures that will be used for the Participant; requirements for continuation and successful completion of the Program; and the minimum eligibility requirements for noncompetitive conversion to term or permanent competitive service employment according to the requirements of the applicable Pathways Program; and the option to convert the Participant to position that has promotion potential (i.e., a career ladder). The agreement is signed by the Participant, Supervisor, and HR Officer/Director or designee.

(15) **Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) or Fellow.** An individual appointed, at the GS-9, GS-11, or GS-12 level (or equivalent), in the excepted service under 5 CFR 213.3402(c).

(16) **Program Participant or Pathways Participant.** An individual appointed under a Pathways Program.

(17) **Qualifying Educational Institution.** A public high school whose curriculum has been approved by a State or local governing body, a private school that provides secondary education as determined under State law, or a homeschool that is allowed to operate in a State; and any of the following educational institutions or curricula that have been accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education: a technical or vocational school; a 2-year or 4-year college or university; a graduate or professional school (e.g., law school, medical school); or a post-secondary homeschool curriculum.

(18) **Quality Ranking Factors.** Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) or competencies that could be expected to enhance significantly the performance in a position, but are not essential for satisfactory performance. Applicants who possess such knowledge, skills, and abilities or competencies may be ranked above those who do not, but no one may be rated ineligible solely for failure to possess such KSAs or competencies. Quality ranking factors must be based on the work of the position and must comply with the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#).

(19) **Selective Factor or Selective Placement Factor.** Knowledge, skills, abilities, or special qualifications that are in addition to the minimum requirements in a qualification standard, but are determined to be essential to perform the duties and responsibilities of a particular position. Applicants who do not meet a selective factor are ineligible for further consideration. Selective Factors must be based on the work of the position and must comply with the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#).

(20) **Student.** An individual accepted for enrollment or enrolled and seeking a degree (diploma, certificate, etc.) in a qualifying educational institution, on a full or half-time basis (as defined by the institution in which the student is enrolled), including awardees of the Harry S. Truman Foundation Scholarship Program under Public Law 93-842. Students need not be in actual physical attendance (i.e., taking online courses), so long as all other requirements are met. An individual who needs to complete less than the equivalent of half an academic/vocational or technical course-load immediately prior to graduating is still considered a student for purposes of this Program.

(21) **Third-party Internship Provider.** A non-Federal entity that contractually provides internship experiences to students that are comparable to the Pathway's Internship Program.

5. [EMPLOYMENT OF HEALTHCARE ADMINISTRATION RESIDENTS, INTERNS AND TRAINEES.] To be used with 5 CFR 213.3402(a), 5 CFR, part 362, and Appendix II-N. When using the Pathways Programs authorities to appoint healthcare administration residents, interns and trainees, HR Offices must consider all eligible and qualifying individuals and must not screen candidates who are not pursuing or have completed education from a preferred program accrediting body.]

a. Healthcare Administration Residents.

(1) Healthcare administration residents are graduate students pursuing a master's degree in a program approved by the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME). Practical experience is for 1 year and is usually performed following the completion of 1 academic year of graduate study.

(2) Residents will be appointed [in the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)]. The Office of Personnel Management has authorized VA to employ residents for a period of 12 months as an exception to the requirements of 5 CFR, part 308.

(3) Compensation for residents is locally established by [facility] Directors at appropriate levels within maximums prescribed by Federal civil service regulations and part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3 of VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration.

(4) Residents appointed under [5 CFR 213.3402(a)] may be noncompetitively converted to [term,] career-conditional or career appointments, as appropriate, provided all requirements of [5 CFR 362.204] are met.

b. Healthcare Administration Interns.

(1) Healthcare administration interns are graduate students pursuing a master's degree in a program approved by the CAHME. Practical experience is typically available during the summer between 2 years of graduate level academic study and is for a period of 2 to 4 months.

(2) Interns whose work assignments are anticipated to equal or exceed 640 hours necessary for noncompetitive conversion must be appointed [in an indefinite appointment (i.e., without time limitation) in the Pathways Internship Program under [5 CFR 213.3402(a)]. Those interns whose work assignments are not anticipated to meet the 640 hours requirement [in the Internship Program] will be appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405.

(3) Compensation for interns appointed under [5 CFR 213.3402(a)] is locally established by facility Directors at appropriate levels within maximums prescribed by Federal civil service regulations and part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3 of VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration. Compensation for those interns who are appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405 will also be in accordance with the provisions of VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration.

(4) Interns appointed under [5 CFR 213.3402(a)] may be noncompetitively converted to [term,] career-conditional or career appointments, as appropriate, provided all requirements of [5 CFR 362.204] are met.

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c. Healthcare Administration Trainees.

(1) Healthcare administration trainees are undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration or a closely related field. Practical experience is usually from 2 to 4 months during the summer between the junior and senior years.

(2) Trainees whose work assignments are anticipated to equal or exceed 640 hours must be appointed [in the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)]. Appointment will be at the GS-3 grade level if the trainee has completed [1 year] of college and at the GS-4 grade level if the trainee has completed [2] years of college. Those trainees whose work assignments are not anticipated to meet the 640 hours requirement necessary [in the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)] for noncompetitive conversion to [term,] career-conditional or career appointments, as appropriate, will be appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7405.

(3) Compensation for trainees appointed under [5 CFR 213.3402(a)] will be at the pay levels for GS-3 or GS-4, as appropriate. Compensation for those trainees who are appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405 will be in accordance with the provisions of VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration.

(4) Trainees appointed under [in the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)] may be noncompetitively converted to [term,] career-conditional or career appointments, as appropriate, provided all requirements of [5 CFR 362.204] are met.

d. Conversion to [Term,] Career-Conditional and Career Appointments. Students meeting all the requirements specified in [the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)] may be converted to [term,] career-conditional or career positions, as appropriate, at the employing medical facility. [Those appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405 are not eligible for noncompetitive appointment to the competitive service under 5 CFR 362.204.] If there is no appropriate position available locally for a student who is considered a good candidate for conversion, the medical facility or the student may check lists of vacancies published by VA Headquarters and contact other VA installations at which the student is interested in being employed.

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CHAPTER 2****6. OTHER EXCEPTED SERVICE APPOINTMENTS.****a. General.**

(1) This paragraph contains the requirements and procedures to be followed in making appointments and position changes to positions through grade GS-15 or equivalent in the excepted civil service under 5 CFR, part 302, other than those covered by paragraphs 1 and 2 of this section. It does not apply to excepted service employment in the Veterans Health Administration under 38 U.S.C. ch. 73 and 74, or to employment in the Veterans Canteen Service under 38 U.S.C. ch. 78.

(2) The requirements of 5 CFR, part 302, and the provisions of this paragraph do not apply to the examination and selection of attorneys in VA. Administration and staff office heads, including the Chairman, Board of Veterans' Appeals, have complete responsibility for accepting attorney applications, evaluating relative qualifications of these candidates, according [V]eterans' preference as appropriate, and except for positions centralized to the Secretary, making final selections.

(3) The Office of Personnel Management excepts positions from the competitive civil service under authority of 5 CFR 213.101. These positions are identified as Schedule A, Schedule B, [Schedule C or Schedule D]. Those excepted positions which are common to more than one agency are listed in 5 CFR, part 213. Those specific to one agency are published annually in the Federal Register under 5 CFR, part 213.

(4) Except where specific VA limitations are otherwise imposed, appointing officers may use any applicable Schedule A or Schedule B authority listed in 5 CFR, part 213 to meet employment needs.

(5) Schedule C positions in VA are of a policy-determining or confidential character and may be made without an OPM or other civil service examination. Schedule C positions are normally located in Central Office. Therefore, the processing of appointments under Schedule C, section 213.3301 or 213.3302 authority is the responsibility of the Central Office Human Resources Service [(05B)].

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(a) **Field Facilities.** Field facility HRM offices having positions to fill in the excepted service, except positions centralized for appointment and placement purposes to the Secretary or an administration or staff office head, will establish a Board. The Human Resources Management Officer is designated as the chairperson of the Board, with an appropriate staff employee, grade GS-7 or above, as the executive secretary. When the staff employee does not meet this requirement, the Human Resources Management Officer will serve both as the chairperson and the executive secretary. Each organizational element having excepted positions for which the Board examines will be represented on the Board by one or more examining members. The members will serve on examining panels when called for such service by the chairperson. While assigned to rating duties, the members will report to the chairperson.

(b) **Central Office.** The Director, Chaplain Service, or designee will establish a Board which examines and certifies candidates for chaplain positions in accordance with the provisions of this paragraph, 5 CFR 6.3 and part 302. The Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS)/HRM will establish a Board to examine and certify eligibles to Central Office positions and to excepted positions centralized for employment purposes to the Secretary or an administration or staff office head. The DAS/HRM will designate the chairperson of the Board and he/she in turn will designate the executive secretary. Each organizational element having excepted positions for which the Board examines will be represented on the Board by one or more examining members. The members will serve on examining panels, as needed, when called for such service by the chairperson. While assigned to rating duties, the members will report to the chairperson.

(2) **Rating Applications.** Applicants will be rated against the appropriate qualification standard and assigned numerical ratings on a scale of 100, with 70 the minimum eligible rating. Such ratings will be augmented by 10 or 5 points, as appropriate, for applicants entitled to [Veterans'] preference. When the number of applicants, following the "rule of three" described in subparagraph (3) below, does not exceed the number of positions to be filled, a rating of "eligible" may be assigned in lieu of a numerical rating. In either case, a notice of the rating must be given to the applicant upon request.

[NOTE: See Appendix II-N for specific procedures for rating certain Pathways Programs positions.]

(3) **Certifying Eligibles.** In response to a request (SF 39) from the appointing officer, eligible candidates will be certified (VA Form 4681) by the Board for employment consideration. Generally, the Board will refer sufficient available candidates to permit selection consideration within the "rule of three." The preference order for referring candidates for professional and scientific positions at GS-9 and higher will follow the pattern described in 5 CFR 302, subpart C. For other positions, either Order A, B, or C described in the above CFR reference, may be selected to refer candidates. Once the order has been selected, it will be consistently used to certify candidates for employment considerations.

NOTE: The VA Form 4681 is superseded by the referral format in USA Staffing, when USA Staffing is used.

(4) **Records.** Applications, examination records, register cards, and records of certification will be maintained in Board files in such a manner that inspection by VA or Office of Personnel Management representatives is possible. VA Form 3959, Application Roster Sheet, may be used in lieu of register cards to show the status of and actions taken on applications. For USA Staffing recruitment, system records are sufficient to meet the requirement for documentation. Job analysis records can be imported directly into USA Staffing.

principles of [V]eteran preference must be followed, as far as administratively feasible. At the discretion of the Secretary, the evaluation and rating process resulting in a numerical rating by the Board may be applied in filling Schedule C positions.

(2) **[Schedule D Positions.** Modifications to examining procedures for Pathways Programs positions are outlined in Appendix II-N of this handbook.]

[(3)] **Former Federal Employee Applicants.** Any [V]eteran preference applicant meeting the qualification requirements of the excepted position may be given an “eligible” rating by the appointing officer, or representative, provided the applicant had prior civilian service in the executive branch of the Federal Government. Such an applicant may be referred by the appointing officer and be selected without regard to the “rule of three.”

[(4)] **Purchase and Hire Employees.** Modification of the examining procedure above may be made for purchase and hire employees when the number of qualified applicants does not exceed the number of jobs to be filled. In this case the applicants may be given an “eligible” rating by the appointing officer, or representative, and be considered for appointment in order of their preference, i.e., 10 percent or more compensably service-connected disabled [V]eterans, other 10-point preference eligibles, 5-point preference eligibles, and non-preference eligibles, in keeping with 5 CFR 302.304(b)(5)(i).

f. **Reasons for Nonselection.** When requesting passover of a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more in favor of lower ranking preference or non-preference eligibles, appointing officers must follow the procedures contained in 5 U.S.C. 3312 and 3318; and, 5 CFR 332.406 and 339.306(b). The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) retains exclusive authority to approve a request to pass over a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more. HR Offices must send these pass over requests to OPM for adjudication. Requests must include a completed SF 62 form and all required supporting documentation.

g. **Placement Follow-up.** A placement follow-up will be used to evaluate the appropriateness of specific placement and employment actions in excepted service positions. Follow-ups will be made for all initial appointments and significant position changes. After the employee has completed at least 90 days in the assignment, a human resources management office staff member will forward a placement follow-up form to the supervisor to obtain information about the employee’s performance, his/her adjustment to the job, and any training or other needs or outstanding work that warrants attention for further placement consideration. Where deficiencies are reported, the employee should also be interviewed to further explore the courses of action that may be taken to overcome them. The follow-up form, VA Form 5-97, Notice of Pending Personnel Action, will be annotated to show that the follow-up was made, and only significant results will be recorded. These procedures are minimum requirements and where possible, extension of the follow-up interview for all placement actions is encouraged. For example, a follow-up of all promotions can be a valuable aid in assessing the results of the facility’s promotion plan and the validity of the evaluation and selection process. Also, separate placement follow-ups with employees can be a valuable source of placement information as well as being an effective employee relations technique.

[APPENDIX F4: QUALIFICATION STANDARD

PATHWAYS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

AUTHORITY: Executive Order 13562, Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates

1. COVERAGE. This appendix outlines the qualification requirements for Schedule D, Internship Program appointments under the Pathways Programs. This qualification standard is mandated for use by VA HR Offices when making appointments and executing in-service placement actions in the Pathways Internship Program. This qualification standard is to be used in conjunction with Appendix N of this part and is consistent with the policies outlined in the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#). Occupations covered by this standard may follow a one- or two-grade interval work pattern. This standard covers the following occupations:

0099 - General Intern (covers occupations in the 0006 through 0095 series)
0199 - Social Science, Psychology, and Welfare Intern
0299 - Human Resources Intern
0399 - General Administrative and Office Services Intern
0499 - Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Intern
0599 - Accounting and Budget Intern
0699 - Medical, Hospital, Dental and Public Health Intern
0799 - Veterinary Medical Science Intern
0899 - Engineering and Architecture Intern
0999 - Legal and Kindred Intern
1099 - Information and Arts Intern
1199 - Business and Industry Intern
1299 - Copyright, Patent, and Trade-Mark Intern
1399 - Physical Sciences Intern
1499 - Library and Archives Intern
1599 - Mathematics and Statistics Intern
1699 - Equipment, Facilities, and Service Intern
1799 - Education Intern
1899 - Inspection, Investigation, Enforcement, and Compliance Intern
1999 - Quality Assurance, Inspection, and Grading Intern
2099 - Supply Intern
2199 - Transportation Intern
2299 - Information Technology Intern

2. DUTIES. The duties of the Internship Program position should be related to either the Intern's academic or career goals. The appointment may be used to meet long term and temporary staffing needs. An indefinite Intern may be appointed without time limitation for an initial period expected to last more than 1 year. A temporary Intern may also be appointed on a temporary basis, not to exceed 1 year, to complete temporary projects, to perform labor-intensive tasks not requiring subject-matter expertise, or to fill traditional summer jobs.

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3. GRADE LEVEL REQUIREMENTS.

a. An Internship Participant must meet the definition of a student as defined in 5 CFR 362.202 and may be appointed up to the highest grade level for which qualified. An applicant with no previous related education or experience may qualify based on the level of education. An applicant with previous education and or experience may be qualified at the appropriate grade level regardless of his or her current level of education. The basis of the qualification may be based on the level of education, general or specialized experience, or a combination of education and experience (as applicable).

(1) **Level of Education.** One full academic year of undergraduate, graduate, vocational, trades, technical or high school education is the number of credit hours determined by the college, university or school to represent 1 year of full-time study. The high school curriculum must be approved by a State or local governing body and may include home-school course work. All education beyond high school must be accredited by an accrediting body or organization recognized by the [U.S. Department of Education](#).

(2) **General Experience.** General experience is experience creditable at grade levels GS-2 through GS-4 where the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to perform the duties of a position are not essential, but where an applicant can demonstrate in his or her past experience the ability to acquire the particular knowledge, skills and competencies. When determining general experience requirements, the requirements may vary based on the position, but in general the experience provides an applicant with or familiarity with certain knowledge, skills, and competencies related to the position.

(3) **Specialized Experience.** In accordance with the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#), specialized experience is experience that has equipped the applicant with the particular knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully perform the duties of the position and is typically in or related to the work of the position to be filled. When crediting specialized experience, the HR Office must determine the normal line of progression (i.e., one- or two- grade interval) in order to accurately describe the quality and level the required specialized experience. For grade levels that indicate general experience to meet minimum requirements, specialized experience may be substituted to meet general experience requirements. General experience may not be substituted for required specialized experience.

(4) **Combining Education and Experience.** Consistent with the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#), HR Offices may combine combinations of education and experience that are qualifying for grade levels that indicate education or (general or specialized) experience are acceptable. When combining education and experience to meet the minimum requirements, first determine the applicant's total qualifying experience as a percentage of the experience required for the grade level. Next determine the applicant's education as a percentage of the education required for the grade level. To determine if the applicant has met the minimum requirement, add the education percentage and experience percentage. The total percentage must equal or exceed 100 percent.

b. The grade level requirements are described in the following table:

GRADE LEVEL	LEVEL OF EDUCATION		LEVEL OF GENERAL EXPERIENCE		LEVEL OF SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE
GS-1	Enrollment in a high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED) program		None		None
GS-2	Completion of high school or GED diploma	OR	3 months or 13 weeks		Not Applicable
GS-3	Completion of 1 full academic year of post-high school study	OR	6 months or 26 weeks		Not Applicable
GS-4	Completion of 2 full academic years of post-high school study or an associate's degree	OR	1 year or 52 weeks		Not Applicable
GS-5	Completion of 4 full academic years of post-high school leading to a bachelor's degree or equivalent degree		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression
GS-6	Completion of 6 full months of graduate level education		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression
GS-7	Completion of 1 full academic year of graduate level education; or Eligibility under the Superior Academic Achievement (S.A.A.) Provision and completion of a bachelor's degree		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression

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GRADE LEVEL	LEVEL OF EDUCATION		LEVEL OF GENERAL EXPERIENCE		LEVEL OF SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE
GS-8	Completion of 1 ½ full academic years of graduate level education, or a master's degree or equivalent degree		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression
GS-9	Completion of 2 full academic years of graduate level education, a master's degree, related equivalent graduate degree, LL.B. or J.D.		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression
GS-10	Completion of 2 ½ academic years of graduate level education, or a master's degree or equivalent graduate degree		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression
GS-11	For research positions, completion of all requirements for a master's or equivalent graduate degree For non-research positions, completion of all requirements for a Ph.D. or equivalent degree		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression
GS-12 and above	No education is qualifying for the GS-12 grade level and above		Not Applicable	OR	1 year or 52 weeks of equivalent to at least next lower grade level in the normal line of progression

8. GRANDFATHERING PROVISION. All persons employed in VA in the Internship Program on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the specific title, series and grade. For employees who do not meet all of the requirements in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:

a. Employees grandfathered into the applicable occupational series under the provision of this paragraph may be reassigned, promoted up to the full performance level of a career ladder position, or

changed to a lower grade within the applicable occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the full performance level or placed in a supervisory or managerial position.

b. Employees who are appointed on a temporary basis (i.e., Interns serving on an appointment with a not-to-exceed (NTE) date) prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their appointment extended or be reappointed, on a temporary or permanent basis, until they fully meet the qualification requirements of this standard.

c. Employees initially grandfathered in the Internship Program who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure that meet all basic requirements of the position must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the program.

d. If an employee who is retained under this provision leaves the Internship Program position in VA, the employee loses protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the Internship Program.]

**APPENDIX E.
HEALTHCARE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT
ADMINISTRATION RESIDENTS, INTERNS AND TRAINEES**

1. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATION RESIDENTS.

- a. Healthcare system management administration residents are graduate students pursuing a master's degree in a program approved by the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME). Practical experience is for 1 year and is usually performed following the completion of 1 academic year of graduate study.
- b. Residents will be appointed under [the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)]].
- c. Compensation for residents is locally established by facility Directors at appropriate levels within maximums prescribed by Federal civil service regulations and VA. (See VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration.)
- d. Residents appointed under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] may be noncompetitively converted to career-conditional, term, or career appointments, as appropriate, provided all requirements of 5 CFR [362.204] are met.

NOTE: *When using the Pathways Programs authorities to appoint healthcare administration residents, HR Offices must consider all eligible and qualifying individuals and must not screen candidates who are not pursuing or have completed education from CAHME or other similar accrediting body.*

2. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATION INTERNS.

- a. Healthcare system management administration interns are graduate students pursuing a master's degree in a program approved by the CAHME. Practical experience is typically available during the summer between 2 years of graduate level academic study and is for a period of 2 to 4 months.
- b. Interns whose work assignments are anticipated to equal or exceed 640 hours necessary for noncompetitive conversion must be appointed under [the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)]. Those interns whose work assignments are not anticipated to meet the 640 hours requirement under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] will be appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405.
- c. Compensation for interns appointed under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] is locally established by facility Directors at appropriate levels within maximums prescribed by Federal civil service regulations and VA. (See VA Handbook 5007) Compensation for those interns who are appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405 will be in accordance with the provisions of VA Handbook 5007.
- d. Interns appointed under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] may be noncompetitively converted to career-conditional, term, or career appointments, as appropriate, provided all requirements of 5 CFR [362.204] are met.

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NOTE: *When using the Pathways Programs authorities to appoint healthcare administration interns, HR Offices must consider all eligible and qualifying individuals and must not screen candidates who are not pursuing or have completed education from CAHME or other similar accrediting body.*

3. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATION TRAINEES.

a. Healthcare system management administration trainees are undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration or a closely related field. Practical experience is usually from 2 to 4 months during the summer between the junior and senior years.

b. Trainees whose work assignments are anticipated to equal or exceed 640 hours must be appointed in [the Pathways Internship Program under 5 CFR 213.3402(a)]. Appointment will be at the GS-3 grade level if the trainee has completed [1] year of college and at the GS-4 grade level if the trainee has completed [2] years of college. Those trainees whose work assignments are not anticipated to meet the 640 hours requirement necessary under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] for noncompetitive conversion to[term,] career-conditional or career appointments, as appropriate, will be appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7405.

c. Compensation for trainees appointed under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] will be at the pay levels for GS-3 or GS-4, as appropriate. Compensation for those trainees who are appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405 will be in accordance with the provisions of VA Handbook 5007.

d. Trainees appointed under 5 CFR 213.[3402(a)] may be noncompetitively converted to career-conditional, term, or career appointments, as appropriate, provided all requirements of 5 CFR [362.204] are met.

4. CONVERSION TO [TERM,] CAREER-CONDITIONAL AND CAREER APPOINTMENTS.

Students meeting all the requirements specified in 5 CFR [362.204] may be converted to [term,] career-conditional or career positions, as appropriate, at the employing medical facility. If there is no appropriate position available locally for a student who is considered a good candidate for conversion, the medical facility or the student may check lists of vacancies published by VA Central Office and contact other VA installations at which the student is interested in being employed.

[APPENDIX N: PATHWAYS PROGRAMS]

1. PURPOSE. This section outlines the policy and procedures for the use of the Pathways Programs, which consists of the Internship, Recent Graduates and Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Programs.

2. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO ALL PATHWAYS PROGRAMS APPOINTMENTS.

a. **Core Principles.** The Pathways Programs are intended to be limited in scope, transparent, and fair to Veterans. The Programs also require an investment from hiring officials in the training, mentoring, and career development of the individuals who are brought into these Programs. HR offices play a critical role in ensuring that hiring officials comply with the intended use of these Programs as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the competitive hiring process.

b. **Merit System Principles and Equal Employment Opportunity.** In all actions related to the Pathways Programs, HR Offices must adhere to the merit system principles in 5 U.S.C. 2301(b), avoid prohibited personnel practices in 5 U.S.C. 2302, and provide equal employment opportunity without regard to race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, or any other non-merit-based factor, as stated in 5 CFR 362.101(c).

c. **Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** The VA Pathways Program Officer coordinates the reestablishment of the MOU with OPM at least every two years and coordinates modifications to the MOU, as requests for changes are received. The Assistant Secretary for OHRA (006) is delegated authority to enter into agreement on behalf of VA. An approved and current MOU must be in place prior to HR Offices making appointments in the Pathways Programs. In accordance with the MOU and 5 CFR 362.104(c), VA will:

- (1) Provide to OPM any information it requests on VA's Pathways Programs;
- (2) Adhere to any caps on the Pathways Programs imposed by the OPM Director;
- (3) Provide information to OPM about VA job opportunities for individuals interested in participating in the Pathways Programs;
- (4) Ensure adherence to the requirements for accepting applications, assessing applicants, rating and ranking qualified candidates, and affording Veterans' preference in accordance with the provisions of 5 CFR, part 302; and
- (5) Provide a meaningful, consistent on-boarding process for each Pathways Programs Participant.

d. **OPM Pathways Programs Oversight.** The OPM Director may establish caps on the number of Pathways Participants whom VA or the entire Federal Government may appoint or convert in any Pathways Program. In the event the OPM Director determines that any caps would be appropriate, OPM will publish notice of such caps in a manner chosen by the OPM Director. The OPM Director may

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establish such caps based on VA or Government-wide use of the Pathways Programs, input from the Executive agencies, and consideration of the following:

- (1) Department MOU compliance;
- (2) Department approach to entry-level hiring;
- (3) Department engagement in sound workforce planning to ensure that an adequate number of permanent positions will be available to which hiring facilities can convert Pathways Participants who successfully complete their Programs;
- (4) Department record in using the Pathways Programs as a supplement to competitive examining, rather than as a substitute for it;
- (5) Department record of publicizing positions in the Pathways Programs, and recruiting and selecting from a broad array of sources; and
- (6) Any other information the OPM Director deems relevant.

e. Workforce Planning and Budgetary Impact.

(1) As key members of the position management team, Human Resources Officials should work with other key players responsible for fiscal functions. Before filling any position under these Programs, hiring officials must determine if the use of the Pathways Programs will help meet the long-term and short-term workforce needs of the facility. The need must be included in their workforce planning to ensure that an adequate number of permanent positions will be available to convert Participants who successfully complete their programs to the title 5 competitive service. This step must occur before a Pathways position is advertised or filled. Facilities must ensure this information is accounted in their workforce plans. Hiring officials must consider the future availability, career path and grade level of target positions when determining to employ a Participant with the expectation of conversion to a permanent position in the competitive service upon completion of the Program. However, under extenuating circumstances it may be appropriate to convert a Participant to a term position and later convert the Participant to a permanent position.

(2) The HR Officer/Director or designee should advise the facility's leadership and other key players of the structure, impact and intent of each Pathways Program. This information may have considerable impact for workforce planning in determining and allocating funding needs, the facility structure, and full-time equivalents (FTE). VA facilities that hire individuals in the Pathways Programs must use available facility funds and FTE allocations.

(3) A Recent Graduate and PMF position funded by the facility is a full-time position and counts toward the maximum number of FTE that an organization may employ. A Recent Graduate and PMFs count against personnel ceilings and their salaries are paid by the employing organization. In some cases, these salaries may be paid or reimbursed by an outside organization (i.e., Administration-level organization). In these cases, the employing facility may determine it unnecessary to account for the

funded position; however, consideration should be given when the facility is planning to convert the Participant to a term or permanent position upon completion of the Pathways program.

(4) Facilities should determine the best approach for accounting for funded and non-funded indefinite Internship (without time limitation) and temporary Internship (not to exceed one year) positions. An Intern whose work assignment is indefinite is appointed without time limits and should be converted permanently to the competitive service upon successful completion of the program.

g. **Bargaining Unit Coverage.** The HR Officer/Director or designee must consult with their designated Labor Management Relations Specialist and/or Classification Specialist to determine if Pathways positions are included or excluded from provisions in applicable labor agreements.

h. **Outreach and Recruitment.**

(1) Facilities are encouraged to conduct outreach and to build partnerships with local colleges, universities, trade schools, etc. to promote the Pathways Programs. This may occur through on-line and/or on-campus informational events and liaison activities.

(2) When actual Pathways opportunities are available and the organization facility is actively recruiting, the recruitment strategy should target individuals from various locations, colleges/universities, and backgrounds helping to create a diverse applicant pool. For Pathways positions, recruitment efforts should not be exclusive to only one institution, but should be a part of comprehensive recruitment strategy that includes a variety of outreach resources.

(3) HR Offices must ensure that public notification requirements are met in accordance with 5 CFR 362.105(b). The public notification requirements are met by posting a job opportunity announcement (JOA) as described in paragraph 2(i) of this appendix. An advertisement or a notice of recruiting event/job fair on OPM's USAJOBS Web site will also assist with marketing upcoming recruitment events and Pathways opportunities. If the recruiting office has Pathways Programs opportunities and attends a recruitment event (i.e., job fair), a JOA should be opened to allow interested individuals to apply to the opportunities available to attendees of the recruitment event. This ensures that all applications are recorded properly in USA Staffing®, 5 CFR, part 302 procedures are followed, Veterans' preference rules are applied with regard to referral and selection. Policy regarding JOAs are found in paragraph 2(i) of this appendix. Policy regarding job advertisements and notices are in paragraph 2(j) of this appendix.

i. **Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA).**

(1) Posting of JOAs ensures that Pathways opportunities meet public notification requirements. JOAs must be posted for at least 5 calendar days and comply with any labor obligations. Hiring offices cannot limit a Pathways JOA to a specific educational institution or geographic area. Opportunities, except for PMF JOAs, are posted on OPM's USAJOBS web site using the USA Staffing® system.

(2) Pathways JOAs must include the following OPM-mandated requirements:

(a) Position title, series, and grade of the position(s) being filled;

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- (b) Geographic location(s) of the position(s) being filled;
 - (c) Information about How to Apply;
 - (d) Reasonable Accommodation statement;
 - (e) Information about how to claim Veterans' preference; and
 - (f) OPM standardized language for fair employment opportunities.
- (3) Pathways JOAs must include the following VA-mandated requirements:
- (a) Special employment Consideration statement;
 - (b) Brief description of duties of the job(s) to be filled;
 - (c) Available work schedules for the job(s) to be filled;
 - (d) Information about the possibility of conversion to permanent appointment (if applicable);
 - (e) Promotion potential (i.e., career ladder) and target grade while serving in the Program (if applicable);
 - (f) Availability of relocation expenses or recruitment/relocation incentives (if applicable);
 - (g) Eligibility for placement, upon conversion, in a position with promotion potential (i.e., career ladder) (if applicable);
 - (h) Any strategies utilized by a facility to limit the number of applicants (if applicable);
 - (i) For Internship Program JOAs, eligibility for conversion based on Superior Academic Achievement (S.A.A.) (if applicable);
 - (j) Any other special requirements and/or agreements (i.e., mobility agreement or continued service agreement);
 - (k) For Recent Graduate Program JOAs, any positive education requirement from the OPM qualification standard (if applicable);
 - (l) For Internship Program JOAs, the required current academic program for a position that are expected (through workforce planning) to convert to a position with positive education requirement (if applicable); and
 - (m) For Recent Graduate Program JOAs, a note stating an applicant within 9 months of completing qualifying education may apply, but he/she must successfully complete academic requirements prior to appointment. The HR office may use this flexibility at its discretion based on hiring needs and the

timing of the recruitment. See the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#).

NOTE: *Internship and Recent Graduate JOAs posted prior to the issuance of this policy may not comply with these mandated requirements. To convert a Participant into a position with a career ladder that was not communicated in the original JOA, the servicing HR Office must initiate a new JOA as outlined in paragraph (2)(i)(4)(b). The facility also has the option to convert the Participant to the competitive service at the appropriate grade for which he or she qualifies and later initiate recruitment for a career ladder position under competitive promotion procedures.*

(4) **Public Notification Methods.** For Internship and Recent Graduate positions, HR Offices must announce positions using the Group Rating procedure described in paragraph 3 of this appendix. To meet public notification requirements, facilities may use the following methods for posting Internship and Recent Graduate JOAs:

(a) **Positions announced to facility and/or all VA Employees.** When the hiring facility chooses to limit the JOA of an Internship or Recent Graduate position to all facility and/or VA employees, the facility must use the option in USA Staffing® to post the JOA to “Agency Employees Only – Intranet Posting Only.” In this case “Intranet” is the VA Careers Web site. Applicants must meet the program eligibility criteria to be considered for the program and be serving in an appointment in the competitive or excepted service. If more than one individual is interested, the agency must apply the selection procedures under 5 CFR, part 302. (Reference: Announcement Work Area of the [Desk Guide for Merit Promotion Purposes Using USA Staffing](#).)

(b) **Positions limited to VA Employees in a specific Pathways Program.** When the hiring facility chooses to limit the JOA of a Pathways Internship or Recent Graduate opportunity to all of facility and/or VA employees currently in a specific Pathways Program, the facility will use the option in USA Staffing® to post the vacancy to “Exclusive Posting – Will Not Appear on USAJOBS Web site or VA Intranet.” The facility will then provide information about the JOA and its web link via an e-mail to the targeted employee population or on a shared network drive accessible to that employee population. Applicants must meet the program eligibility criteria to be considered for the program and be serving in a Pathways appointment in excepted service. If more than one individual is interested, the agency must apply the selection procedures under 5 CFR, part 302. (Reference: Announcement Work Area of the [Desk Guide for Merit Promotion Purposes Using USA Staffing](#).)

(c) **Positions announced to Candidates outside of VA.**

1. When any Pathways Internship or Recent Graduate position will be open to applicants outside VA, the hiring facility will use USA Staffing® to post the vacancy on USAJOBS Web site open to the general public who meet the eligibility requirements for the program. When Internship or Recent Graduate Program opportunities announced to potential candidates outside of the Department’s current workforce are likely to yield an overwhelming high number of applicants. To mitigate the impact, HR Offices should consult with hiring officials to tailor the job analysis and other assessment tools to obtain the desired candidate pool.

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2. The consultation with the hiring official should consider various factors that include, but are not limited to the following: shortening or extending the length of the announcement period; limiting the number of applications on midnight of the day on which applications reach a specified number, e.g., 75 or 100; and using specific eligibility requirements for entrance into the Pathways Internship Programs, e.g., ability to work a specified number of hours each week or at a specific location or maintenance of a minimum grade point average as an eligibility criteria. Any strategies utilized by a facility must be defensible and included in the job opportunity announcement so that all potential applicants are informed.

NOTE: *Current Internship Participants from other agencies may apply to VA Internship public notices announced to candidates outside of VA. Paragraph 2(i) does not cover conversions of Interns from other agencies into VA competitive service positions which are covered in Paragraph 4(p) of this appendix.*

(d) **Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program.** OPM administers the announcement for PMF positions and determines the open period for interested individuals to apply for the Pathways PMF Program. This process also includes an assessment. OPM then publishes a list of PMF finalists. To meet public notice requirements for PMF positions, the facility-level Pathways Program Coordinator (PPC) must work with their respective Administration Pathways Programs Officer (PPO) who will coordinate the posting of the vacancy on the PMF Program web site. For specific job openings, for which PMF finalists may apply, VA will place job postings on an OPM-maintained PMF Program web site.

j. Publication of Job Advertisements and Notices of Recruiting Event/Job Fairs.

(1) When hosting or attending recruitment events or job fairs HR Offices must post Internship and Recent Graduate JOAs on OPM's USAJOBS web site and use the system to allow applicants to apply online. This practice builds consistency within the Department and ensures that all applications are recorded in USA Staffing®. HR Offices may consider using USA Staffing® to post a job advertisement or a notice of a recruiting event/job fair on the USAJOBS web site to publicize Pathways Internship and Recent Graduate opportunities in addition to hosting or attending a recruitment event or job fair.

(2) A job advertisement or notice of a recruiting event or job fair is posted similarly to a JOA, but does not include the "apply online" feature. The job advertisement and notice is used to specifically direct interested applicants to a VA intranet site, i.e., VA Careers, which contains information about the event and how to apply if an interested person is unable to attend the actual event.

k. Appointments.

(1) Facilities must fill all positions under the Pathways Programs using the excepted service appointing authority provided by 5 CFR 213.3402 (a), (b), or (c); and will be documented with the appropriate codes and remarks from OPM's [Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#). OPM's [Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#) contains Nature of Action and Legal Authority Codes and required remarks to be used when documenting the Pathways appointment and the conversion actions to the competitive service on the Standard Form 50.

(2) Facilities must follow the procedures of 5 CFR, part 302 as described in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2 when filling a position under a Pathways Program. Appointments are subject to all the requirements and conditions governing term, career-conditional, or career employment, including the investigation to establish an appointee's qualifications, eligibility, and suitability. Hiring documentation should be properly filed in the electronic Official Personnel Folder (e-OPF) in accordance with OPM's [Guide to Recordkeeping](#) and guidance issued by OHRM's Human Resources Information Service (056).

1. **Qualification Standards.** To ensure consistency in the Department, Internship Program applicants are to be evaluated using the VA Pathways Internship Program qualification standard in Appendix II-F4. Recent Graduates and PMF Programs positions are evaluated using the appropriate OPM qualification standards for the specific occupational series.

m. **Selective Factor.**

(1) For Internship and Recent Graduate positions, a hiring facility may use a selective factor, sometimes referred to as a screen-out factor, to identify special requirements that are absolutely needed to perform the work of an individual position. A selective factor can include a requirement for a specific knowledge, skill, and ability (KSA) or competency or Federal or State requirement for licensure or certification. A selective factor becomes part of the minimum requirements for a position, and individuals who do not meet it are ineligible for further consideration. A selective factor can be used for a position at any grade level where specialized experience is used to meet the minimum qualification requirements.

(2) It is essential that any selective factor used in filling a particular vacancy be included in the JOA and is established during the job analysis process. Hiring facilities cannot require applicants to meet selective factors that were not established prior to advertising a position, nor can they require selective factors that were not made known to applicants. Selective factors cannot be so narrow that they preclude from consideration applicants who could perform the duties of the position; require KSAs/competencies that could be learned readily during the normal period of orientation to the position; be so specific as to exclude from consideration applicants without prior Federal experience; be so restrictive that they run counter to the goal of placing applicants from priority placement lists established to assist in the placement of employees affected by reductions in force; or require the completion of educational requirements for specific coursework for occupations that do not have a positive education requirement.

n. **Quality Ranking Factor.**

(1) A quality ranking factor (QRF) is a knowledge, skill, or ability (KSA) that could be expected to enhance performance in a position, but are not essential for satisfactory performance. QRFs focus on the level of proficiency the applicant brings to the position. A QRF can be used for a position at any grade level where specialized experience is used to meet the minimum qualification requirements.

(2) QRFs are determined and recorded during the job analysis process. Applicants with higher proficiency levels should perform better in the position. Applicants who possess such QRFs may be ranked above those who do not, but no applicant may be rated ineligible (i.e., screened out) for failure to

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possess a QRF. QRFs are based on the work of the position and must comply with the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#).

o. **Citizenship.** Facilities may appoint a non-citizen provided that the Pathways Participant is lawfully admitted to the United States as a permanent resident or is otherwise authorized to be employed. A Pathways Participant **must** be a United States citizen or national to be eligible for noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service.

p. **Compensation.** Pay setting policies are covered in VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration. The rules for setting pay upon the initial appointment and conversion of a Participant are governed by the pay administration rules of the pay system or pay plan of the Participant's position under the Pathways program. In determining the Participant's compensation, facilities may also use any applicable pay flexibilities, within guidelines, available under the title 5 pay system for General Schedule (GS) and Federal Wage Grade (WG) pay plans (e.g., recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives GS schedule positions, special rates under 5 CFR, part 530, subpart C; pay retention eligibility under 5 CFR, part 536, subpart C; and the superior qualifications and special needs pay setting authority and the maximum payable rate rule under 5 CFR, part 531, subpart B).

q. **Employment of relatives.** Appointments and conversions of Pathways Programs Participants must comply with 5 CFR, part 310. A Pathways Participant may work in the same facility with a relative when there is no direct reporting relationship and the relative is not in a position to influence or control the Participant's appointment, employment, promotion, advancement, performance rating or training opportunities.

r. **Performance and Progress Evaluation.** Each Participant serving more than 90 calendar days in a 12 month period must be placed on a performance plan, as prescribed by 5 CFR, part 430 or other applicable law, regulation or VA policy, establishing performance elements and standards that are directly related to acquiring and demonstrating the various leadership, technical, and/or general competencies expected of the Participant, as well as the elements and standards established for the duties assigned. VA Handbook 5013, Performance Management Systems, Part I - Title 5 Performance Appraisal Program, does not require a formally established performance plan for temporary title 5 excepted service employees expected to work 90 calendar days or less in a 12-month period, e.g., a Pathways Intern hired for the summer with a corresponding not-to-exceed date. However, performance expectations must still be communicated to the Intern in writing in accordance with the Participant Agreement.

s. **Separations.**

(1) A Hiring official or supervisor, in consultation with the servicing HR Office, may terminate a Pathways Participant for reasons including misconduct, poor performance, failure to meet the requirements set forth in the Participant Agreement, or for a suitability issue under the provisions of this chapter and in accordance with VA Handbook 5021, Employee/Management Relations.

(2) A Pathways Participant may resign at any time during the Program by submitting a notice of resignation. The notice should include the effective date of resignation, forwarding contact information

(e.g., address, phone number and email) and, if desired, a reason for the resignation. This information should be documented in accordance with Chapter 31 of OPM's [Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#), and properly filed in the e-OPF in accordance with OPM's [Guide to Recordkeeping](#) and guidance issued by OHRM's Human Resources Information Service (056).

t. Tenure or Career Tenure. Time spent serving as a Pathways Participant counts towards career tenure when the individual is noncompetitively converted to a permanent position in the competitive service upon completion of the Program, with or without an intervening term appointment, and without a break in service of one day. Though Pathways Participants are eligible for noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service upon successful completion of their Program and any other applicable conversion requirements, service in a Pathways Program confers no right to further employment in either the competitive or excepted service. Facilities wishing to convert Pathways Participants must execute the required actions to do so.

u. Trial Period.

(1) Policy concerning trial periods for title 5 Excepted Service appointments is covered in Part II, Chapter 2, Section C, Paragraph 6h of this handbook. Individuals selected for Pathways excepted appointments lasting more than 1 year (indefinite) are required to serve a 1-year trial period. This means that all Pathways Participants, with the exception of those appointed to temporary Internship appointments (not to exceed 1 year), serve or the time served is creditable towards meeting a trial period.

(2) The entire period served under an Internship Program (appointed indefinitely) will count toward the 1-year trial period if the appointment is initially established with an ending date of more than 1 year. VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Chapter 2, Section C, Paragraph 6h, requires a 1-year trial period for excepted indefinite appointments lasting more than 1 year. If the Intern has served at least 1 year in the Pathways Program, upon conversion to the competitive service from these programs, the Intern is not required to serve a probationary period in accordance with 5 CFR 315.802. If a full year is not served prior to conversion, the prior Federal civilian and creditable Pathways program service is credited toward the completion of the trial period in the same manner as prescribed in 5 CFR 315.802.

(3) The entire period served under the Recent Graduates and Presidential Management Fellows Programs is a trial period. Upon conversion to the competitive service from these programs, the employee is not required to serve a probationary period in accordance with 5 CFR 315.802. Furthermore, prior Federal civilian service is credited toward the completion of the required trial period in the same manner as prescribed in 5 CFR 315.802.

v. Requirement for Considering Excepted Service Priority Referral Eligibles. Pathways appointments, which are in the title 5 excepted service, are subject to the regulatory provisions governing any facility-established Priority Reemployment List (PRL) and/or Reemployment List (RL) under 5 CFR, part 302, subpart C. Pathways appointments and related noncompetitive conversions to the competitive service are not subject to the regulatory provisions in the competitive service for the Reemployment Priority List (RPL), the Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP), or the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP), as stated in 5 CFR 330.211(f)(3), 5 CFR 330.609(e)(3), and 5 CFR 330.707(h)(3), respectively.

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w. **Reporting.** On an annual basis the VA PPO will collect from each Administration PPO, at a minimum, the following information:

(1) For the coming year:

(a) The occupations for which the Pathways Programs will be used to fill entry-level positions.

(b) The percentage of positions to be filled under the Internship, Recent Graduates, and PMF Programs.

(2) For the previous year:

(a) The number of participants initially appointed under each Pathways Program.

(b) The percentage of the agency's overall hires made from each Pathways Program.

(c) The number of Pathways Program participants converted to the competitive service for each Pathways Program.

(d) The number of Pathways Program participants who were separated for each Pathways Program.

x. **Applicability of VA Time-in-Grade Restrictions for Pathways Programs.**

(1) VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part III, Chapter 2, paragraph 5b, and Appendix III-B, extends time-in-grade (TIG) restrictions to VA title 5 excepted service GS positions; however, TIG restrictions do not apply to promotions or appointments of a Pathways Programs Participant.

(2) If otherwise eligible, Internship and Recent Graduate Participants serving in career-ladder Pathways positions may be promoted upon successfully meeting educational requirements.

(3) TIG restrictions do not apply to a conversion of a Pathways Participant to a position in the competitive service. This means that upon meeting the eligibility requirements for noncompetitive conversion the Participant may be converted to a higher grade level in the competitive service if the qualification requirement is met as long as the job opportunity announcement included the target position for conversion. After conversion to the competitive service, TIG restrictions apply to movements in accordance with TIG provisions in 5 CFR, part 300, subpart F.

(4) A current and former competitive service federal employee is not required to meet TIG requirements to be appointed into any Pathways positions in the excepted service. In addition, current Pathways Participants selected for and converting to a new Pathways Programs appointment (i.e., Intern NTE converting to Internship (without time limitation) are not required to meet TIG restrictions).

(5) Time-in-grade restrictions are not applicable to Federal Wage Grade (WG) System positions. However, promotions to WG positions must follow merit system principles even in the absence of specific controls or restrictions.

y. **Veterans' Preference.** For any Pathways position, the hiring facility must ensure that Veterans' preference provisions in 5 CFR, part 302, subpart C, are applied for applicants for all Pathways Program positions regardless of the area of consideration.

NOTE: *Regarding a referral for PMF candidates, the VA PMF Coordinator must adjudicate Veterans' preference prior to issuing the list to the hiring official.*

z. **Voluntary Reassignments and Demotions for Pathways Participants.** The HR Officer/Director or designee, should consult with the hiring official to determine the best recruitment and hiring strategy. An organization is permitted, at its discretion, to process a voluntary reassignment or voluntary demotion when the following conditions are met:

- (1) The Participant is eligible to remain in the specific Pathways Programs.
- (2) The new position is in the same type of Pathways Program (i.e., Intern NTE to Intern NTE).

NOTE: *Movements to a different program (i.e., Internship to Recent Graduate) or a different appointment type (i.e., Internship NTE to Internship without time limitation) must meet public notification and Veterans' preference requirements.*

(3) The new position is in the same organizational entity (i.e., service or division) as indicated by an approved organizational chart or position listing.

(4) The Participant is qualified for the new position.

(5) The movement results in a reassignment or demotion to a position without any known promotion potential.

(6) No more than one employee requests a reassignment or demotion for a certain position. If more than one request is received and/or there are other potentially eligible Participants in the facility, a public notification must be issued at a minimum to all current Program Participants in the facility. The selection procedures in 5 CFR, part 302 will apply.

(7) The selection does not violate any prohibited personnel practice and/or merit system principle.

(8) Noncompetitive movement of an Internship Program Participant from another organization or VA facility is prohibited unless the move is a condition of employment (i.e., mobility agreement) and it was included in the original JOA. A selection of a Participant from another federal agency requires public notice as described in paragraph 2(i) of this appendix.

aa. **Participant Agreement.** Each VA Pathways Programs Participant must be issued a Participant Agreement. The appropriate officials must sign the agreement within 10 calendar days of the appointment. A change to the Participant Agreement warrants a new agreement with new signatures each signing party. The PPMO office provides the Participant Agreements.

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bb. **Movement from the Competitive to the Excepted Service.** If selected for a Pathways Position, a current civilian employee serving under a non-temporary appointment in the competitive service may not be moved to the excepted service unless the employee has been informed in writing how his/her rights, tenure, and benefits are affected by the change. The employee must also submit a written statement acknowledging that he/she is leaving the competitive service voluntarily to accept a new appointment in the excepted service.

cc. **Records.** An electronic recruitment case file must be established and maintained for every new Pathways appointment. The file should a copy of the JOA, all applications with supporting documentation, referral certificates, and the selecting official's decision.

3. REFERRAL AND SELECTION PROCEDURES.

a. **Introduction.** Applicants for VA Pathways Internship and Recent Graduate Programs positions are to be rated, referred, and selected using a category-rating like process called Group Rating. Group Rating is similar to category rating for competitive service positions. The group rating system provides eligible Veterans and priority eligibles the same referral advantage as traditional methods described in 5 CFR, part 302. The recruitment procedures covered in this section apply to internal and external job opportunity announcements (JOAs) for Pathways positions.

b. **Exclusion.** *Luevano Consent Decree* covered positions that fall under Administrative Careers with America (ACWA) testing requirements in the Recent Graduate Program are not covered by the procedures in this section. An appropriately assigned VA Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) conducts recruitment for these positions as rating and ranking is based on ACWA numerical scores, as applicable. ACWA applies to certain two-grade interval administrative positions that are being recruited for at the GS-5 and/or GS-7 grade levels. Any alternative testing tool (i.e., other valid assessment) used in the place of the ACWA test must be approved for use by Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).

c. **Application of Group Rating Procedure for Internship and Recent Graduate positions.** Group Rating is a category-rating like process designed for VA Pathways Programs and allows for selection from a large, high quality group of candidates. The hiring official must make a selection from among all of the eligibles in the highest quality group. A hiring official may not select a non preference eligible over a preference eligible unless an objection or pass over request is sustained. A selection must be made from within the highest quality group regardless of the number of candidates. Preference eligibles receive absolute preference within each group.

d. **Occupational Assessments.** It is imperative that the hiring official (or other subject matter expert), in consultation with the servicing HR Office, develop a strong job analysis. This helps differentiate between candidates. The hiring official and servicing HRO must establish and define the quality groups in the job analysis prior to issuing the JOA. In Group Rating, numerical scores are not assigned to applicants; however, the job analysis is used to create the occupational assessment which is used, along with the other application materials, to place applicants in the appropriate quality group.

e. **Quality Groups.** In Group Rating there must be defined quality groups. Quality groups are defined to reflect the requirements to perform the job successfully and to distinguish differences in the quality of each applicant's job-related competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs).

(1) **Internship Positions.** Under the Group Rating procedure, eligible applicants who meet basic minimum qualification requirements established for the position and whose job-related competencies or KSAs have been assessed are ranked by being placed in one of three quality groups: (1) Best Qualified (2) Well Qualified and (3) Qualified.

(2) **Recent Graduate Positions.** Under the Group Rating procedure, eligible applicants who meet basic minimum qualification requirements established for the position and whose job-related competencies or KSAs have been assessed are ranked by being placed in one of four quality groups: (1) Highly Qualified (2) Best Qualified (3) Well Qualified and (4) Qualified.

NOTE: *Due to the type of positions filled using the Recent Graduates authority, it is appropriate to assess Recent Graduates positions in the same manner as VA competitive service positions subject to Category Rating.*

(3) **PMF Positions.** The Office of Personnel (OPM) administers the application process for the PMF Program and conducts a competition for the selection of Finalists based on 5 CFR, part 302. OPM determines the qualifications for PMF finalists at the GS-9 grade level.

f. **Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) Requirements.** Servicing HR Offices must describe each quality group in the JOA. The JOA must clearly state how applicants will be rated, ranked, and selected with the pre-defined quality groups (i.e., “Highly Qualified and Qualified” or “Highly-Qualified, Well-Qualified, and Qualified”). The JOA must clearly describe how Veterans’ preference is applied under group rating procedures.

g. **Veterans’ Preference.**

(1) After the appropriate quality group is identified for each qualified applicant, Veterans’ preference is adjudicated for each applicant based on his/her supporting documentation submitted with their application materials. In Group Rating, certified preference eligible Veterans are listed ahead of non preference eligibles within each quality group. In Group Rating, Veterans’ preference order is as follows:

(a) 30% Compensable Disability Preference (CPS)/Compensable Disability Preference (CP) Eligibles

(b) Disability Preference (XP) Eligibles

(c) Tentative Preference (TP) Eligibles

(d) Sole Survivorship Preference (SSP) Eligibles

(e) Non Preference (NV) Eligibles

(2) For Professional and Scientific positions at the GS-9 grade level and above, CPS and CP eligibles do not automatically float to the top of the highest quality group. Applicants are placed in the appropriate quality groups, preference eligibles are then listed ahead of non preference eligibles within

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each group. Professional and scientific positions are identified in the [OPM Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families](#). For all other positions, eligible and qualified CPS and CP eligibles automatically float to the top of the highest quality group followed by other preference eligibles and last non preference eligibles.

h. Issuing Referral Certificates. To issue a referral certificate, certified eligibles are placed in the appropriate quality groups using a score-based group rating method. As described in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part I, Appendix B, test scores may be used as part of the job-related criteria to place eligible candidates into quality categories, as long as the test assesses job-related competencies/KSAs. If using test scores, HR Offices may rank applicants using this score-based method. USA Staffing will assign each applicant a score based on his/her occupational assessment responses. The HR Office assesses each applicant for minimum qualifications. For those applicants that meet the minimum qualifications, they are placed in predetermined groups based on the following score ranges:

(a) The Internship Program, certificates have three (3) groups:

1. Best Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 97 and 100.
2. Well Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 85 and 96.99.
3. Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 70 and 84.99.

(b) The Recent Graduate Program, certificates have four (4) groups:

1. Highly Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 97 and 100.
2. Best Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 90 and 96.99.
3. Well Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 80 and 89.99.
4. Qualified Group - Applicants who have a score between 70 and 79.99.

NOTE: *Scores are not listed on referral certificates and should not be used to order the applicants. In addition, Veterans' preference points are not added to the scores. Veterans' preference, once adjudicated, is used to place preference eligibles at the top of the appropriate category as described below.*

i. Selection.

(1) **Requirement for Considering Excepted Service Priority Referral Eligibles.** Pathways appointments, which are in the title 5 excepted service, are subject to the regulatory provisions governing any facility-established Priority Reemployment List (PRL) and/or Reemployment List (RL) under 5 CFR, part 302, subpart C. Pathways appointments and related noncompetitive conversions to the competitive service are not subject to the regulatory provisions in the competitive service for the Reemployment Priority List (RPL), the Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP), or the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP), as stated in 5 CFR 330.211(f)(3), 5 CFR 330.707(e)(3), and 5 CFR 330.707(h)(3), respectively. The order of selection under group rating is as follows:

(2) Order of Selection for Professional and Scientific Positions at the GS-9 Grade Level and Above. Within each of the quality groups, preference eligibles are listed ahead of non preference eligibles with Veterans' preference status annotated in alphabetical order (by first or last name). Non preference eligibles are placed in alphabetical order (by first or last name) following preference eligibles. CPS and CP preference eligibles are not automatically placed at the top of the highest quality group. The certificate of eligibles must identify certified eligibles in the following order within each quality group:

- (a) Persons entitled to priority consideration as defined in 5 CFR 302.103.
- (b) Eligible candidates in the highest quality group.
- (c) Eligible in the next lower quality group.

(3) Order of Selection for All other positions. Within each of the quality groups, preference eligibles are listed ahead of non preference eligibles with Veterans' preference type noted in alphabetical order (by first or last name). The remaining eligibles are placed in alphabetical order (by first or last name). CPS and CP preference eligibles are automatically placed at the top of the highest quality group. The certificate of eligibles must identify eligibles in the following order:

- (a) Persons entitled to priority consideration as defined in 5 CFR 302.103.
- (b) Eligibles in highest quality group by Veterans' preference status.
- (c) Eligibles in the next lower quality group (if the top two groups are merged).

(4) Pass over and Objection Procedures. Veterans' preference is absolute within each quality group. A hiring official is only permitted to select a non preference eligible over a preference eligible if an appropriate objection and/or pass over request, as applicable is sustained. A request to object to or pass over a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more must be adjudicated by OPM. A request to object to or pass over a non preference eligible or a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of less than 30 percent must be adjudicated by the servicing Human Resources Officer/Director. Objection and pass over procedures based on medical and suitability reasons are described in paragraphs (7) and (8) of this section.

(5) Objection or Pass over of a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more.

(a) The objection to or pass over request must include written justification from the hiring official that fully documents the reason(s) for the objection to or pass over request. Appropriate documentation may include interview notes, questions, reference checks, police reports, qualification standard, etc. and must include Standard Form 62 (SF-62), Agency Request to Pass over a Preference Eligible or Object to an Eligible. The objection to or pass over request, signed by the facility Director, must be sent by the servicing HRO to Director, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (RPPS) (059).

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(b) Upon completing a review of the request, RPPS/059 will forward the request to OPM for adjudication or return the objection to or pass over request to the servicing HR Office without approval. OPM will issue a decision letter that states whether the request is approved or denied. If OPM does not sustain the objection to or pass over request, the hiring official may challenge the decision by submitting additional information to support a favorable decision; or consider/select the preference eligible for a job.

(6) Objection or pass over of a preference eligible rated less than 30 percent.

(a) The hiring official must fully document and submit the reason(s) for the objection to or pass over request. It is important to prepare and treat local requests similarly to those submitted to OPM. Appropriate documentation may include interview notes, questions, reference checks, police reports, qualification standard, etc. and must include the SF-62.

(b) The HR Officer/Director is required to document a decision in a formal memorandum for the record that states whether the request is approved or denied and the basis for the approval or denial. The justification documentation should be the same as the documentation submitted for a 30 percent disabled Veteran objection to or pass over request and uploaded and maintained in the recruitment case file in USA Staffing.

(7) Objection or Pass over Request for Physical or Medical Conditions.

(a) Requests to object to or pass over any preference eligible based on a physical or medical condition must be adjudicated by OPM. A hiring official may submit a request to object to or pass over a preference eligible when it is believed the applicant may have a physical or medical (including mental) condition that will prevent him or her from performing the full range of essential duties and responsibilities of the position safely and efficiently.

(b) The hiring official must assess whether reasonable accommodation can be provided to permit performance of the job despite the condition when considering whether a physical or medical condition will have an impact on an eligible's capacity to perform the job efficiently and safely. The servicing HR Office must submit the request, signed by the facility Director, along with thorough supporting documentation to the Office of Personnel Management, Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability Division, Employment Division – Medical Pass overs.

(c) If OPM sustains the objection to or pass over request, the preference eligible must be removed from consideration for the vacant position and the hiring official may select the next available certified preference or non preference eligible on the referral. If OPM does not sustain the objection to or pass over request, the hiring official may challenge the decision by submitting additional information to support a favorable decision; or consider/select the preference eligible for a job.

(8) Objection or Pass over of a Preference Eligible based on Suitability.

(a) The servicing HR Office must consult with the VA Office of Operations, Security and Preparedness; Personnel Security and Suitability Service (07C) to determine if an objection to or pass

over is warranted locally for a preference eligible rated less than 30 percent, based on potentially disqualifying suitability information.

(b) A request to object to or pass over a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more based on suitability must be adjudicated by OPM. The servicing HR Office must submit the request, signed by the facility Director, along with thorough supporting documentation to the VA Office of Operations, Security and Preparedness; Personnel Security and Suitability Service (07C). VA Office of Operations, Security and Preparedness; Personnel Security and Suitability Service (07C) will forward the request to OPM for adjudication or return the request to the servicing HR Office without action, if the request is incomplete. Requests for suitability based actions must be sent to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Director, Personnel Security and Suitability Service (07C), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

4. INTERNSHIP PROGRAM. The Pathways Internship Program provides the opportunity for students to explore Federal careers as paid employees while completing their education in high schools, colleges, trade schools, and other qualifying educational institutions.

a. **Eligibility.** Participant must be a student that is accepted for enrollment or enrolled and seeking a degree diploma, certificate, etc. in a qualifying educational institution, on a full or half-time basis (as defined by the institution in which the student is enrolled), including awardees of the Harry S. Truman Foundation Scholarship Program under Public Law 93-842.

(1) A student need not be in actual physical attendance, so long as all other requirements are met;

(2) An individual who needs to complete less than the equivalent of half an academic/vocational or technical course-load immediately prior to graduating is still considered a student for purposes of this Program; and

(3) A student accepted for enrollment who then does not actually enroll for that educational term loses eligibility to receive a Pathways Internship appointment or to remain in one if already appointed unless it falls under the definition of a break in the program as identified in paragraph 4n.

b. Classification and Qualification Requirements.

(1) Intern positions under Pathways Programs may only be classified using OPM classification standards for title 5 positions. Intern positions under the G.S. or appropriate pay plan must be classified to the -99 series of the appropriate occupational group. Intern positions under the Federal Wage System must be classified to the -01 series of the appropriate occupational group. The -99 series and -01 series may be classified as one and two grade intervals positions.

(2) All positions classified to student trainee series, including -99 series and -01 series, must be titled *Student Trainee* followed by a parenthetical title consistent with the occupational field involved. For example: Student Trainee (Human Resources Management), Student Trainee (Accounting), or Student Trainee (Civil Engineering).

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(3) Individuals' qualifications must be evaluated using the VA Pathways Internship Program Qualification Standard in Appendix II-F4. Interns may be appointed at the highest grade level of the position advertised in which they are qualified.

c. **Grade Point Average (G.P.A.).** Students must possess an acceptable average G.P.A. as defined by the educational institution to be eligible for appointment and to remain eligible for participation in the Program. As applicable, at the time of appointment and upon request, students must demonstrate an overall Grade-Point Average (G.P.A.) of 2.0 or above on a 4.0 scale as recorded on the official transcript. This equates to "C" or better. G.P.A.'s should be rounded to one decimal place. For example, 1.95 will round to 2.0 making a student eligible for appointment and continuation in the program. A 1.94 will round to 1.9 making a student ineligible for appointment in the Internship Program. For students in educational institutions that do not use a G.P.A. system, the HR Officer/Director or designee should request that the student provide verification of achieving an average or above standing with the institution.

NOTE: *Interns appointed prior to the release date of this policy are not required to meet the G.P.A. requirement; however, they must be deemed by their education institution as academically in "good standing" to remain eligible for participation in the Program. If an Internship Program Participant is promoted, demoted, or reassigned into a new Pathways Programs position, he/she must meet the G.P.A. requirement.*

d. **Appointments.** Appointments must be pursuant to the VA Pathways MOU using the Schedule D excepted service appointing authority 5 CFR 213.3402(a) and comply with workforce planning efforts. Facilities may make initial appointments of Interns at any grade level consistent with the VA Pathways Internship Program Qualification Standard in Appendix II-F4, depending on the candidates' qualifications and the facility's needs. The duties of the position to which the individual is appointed must be related to either the Intern's academic or career goals. If the public notice included the option for possible noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service, the Intern should possess and must be working towards meeting the minimum qualifications for the expected position of conversion.

e. **Types of Appointments.**

(1) Prior to announcing an Internship position, the facility must initially determine the needs of the organization based on documented workforce planning efforts. The Internship Program may be used to meet long term and temporary staffing needs.

(2) Facilities may appoint an Intern without time limitation for an initial period expected to last more than 1 year. Intern appointments are not required to have an end date (i.e., not to exceed (NTE) date). However, facilities are required to specify an end date of the appointment in the Participant Agreement with the Intern.

(3) Facilities may appoint an Intern on a temporary basis, not to exceed (NTE) 1 year, to complete temporary projects, to perform labor-intensive tasks not requiring subject-matter expertise, or to fill traditional summer jobs. Interns appointed on a temporary basis, not to exceed 1 year, **must** be coded with a not to exceed date which is the ending date. Facilities may fill these temporary appointments and extend them without regard to service limits and restrictions in 5 CFR 213.104.

f. Appointments into Internship Program Positions with Positive Education Requirements.

(1) A positive education requirement is minimum educational requirement in a qualification standard that is established when the work cannot be performed by a person who does not possess the prescribed minimum education.

(2) An Internship JOA may include educational eligibility criteria if the position is targeted for conversion to a position that has a positive education requirement. This means that the facility may indicate that only applicants who have completed and those who are currently completing certain required course work are eligible for the Pathways appointment. The JOA should clearly state that the positive education requirement is not a minimum qualification requirement, but that possession of the coursework (completed and/or in progress) is based on the targeted position's occupational qualification standard. The JOA must identify the targeted position and a statement about the possibility of conversion to the competitive service.

(3) For positions that do not have positive education requirements, agencies may not impose education degree requirements or require that specific courses have been, or will be, taken as an eligibility requirement. The agency may indicate in the Pathways job opportunity announcement that they seek or prefer candidates who are pursuing specific degree paths or courses. However, agencies must follow the selection procedures in 5 CFR, part 302, before making a selection.

g. Compensation. Pay setting policies are covered in VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration. Since education is the primary basis for qualifications for the Pathways Internship Program, it is not appropriate to use superior qualifications or special needs pay setting authority in 5 U.S.C. 5333 to set the basic pay for the initial appointment of an individual to the Intern Program. Pay for initial appointments for Interns as a civilian employee of the Federal Government must be set using the payable rate of basic pay (regardless of tenure) at the minimum rate of the highest applicable rate range for the Intern's position of record.

h. Eligibility for Within-Grade Increases. Participants in temporary Internship Program positions limited to 1 year or less are not eligible for within-grade increases. See VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration, Part III, Chapter 5.

i. Promotion.

(1) Advancement to a position at a higher grade level (except for a career ladder promotion) or to a position with higher known promotion potential requires public notification and selection procedures under which 5 CFR, part 302 rules apply.

(2) Temporary Interns on appointments not to exceed 1 year are not eligible for promotion, but may be eligible for a new appointment in a position at a higher grade.

j. Career Ladder Promotion. Interns without time limits may be noncompetitively promoted to a higher graded Intern position, prior to conversion, upon meeting the qualification and performance requirements. The target grade level and eligibility of promotion potential must have been

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communicated in the JOA in order for an Intern to receive consideration for a noncompetitive promotion while serving in the program. Career ladder promotion is strictly at the supervisor's discretion. To qualify for promotion, the Intern must meet the experience and/or education requirements and must be performing at a fully satisfactory level.

k. **Reassignment and Demotion.** See paragraph 2(z) of this appendix.

l. **Extensions of Interns Appointed on a Temporary Basis (Not to Exceed 1 year).** Facilities must use discretion in extending temporary Interns past the original not-to-exceed date considering the basis for the appointment. It is not appropriate to affect extensions to circumvent public notice requirements meaning that temporary appointments may be extended as long as the facility can document that the justification of the original appointment remains (i.e., temporary project has not been completed, to perform labor-intensive tasks not requiring subject-matter expertise, or to fill traditional summer jobs). Within 10 calendar days of affecting the extension, the Pathways Participant Agreement must be updated and signed by all parties. HR Offices may not extend the not-to-exceed date of any Intern that has completed his/her academic program unless the Intern meets the definition of the student in accordance with 5 CFR 362.202.

m. **Work Schedules.** There are no limitations on the number of hours an Intern can work per week as long as any applicable laws and regulations governing overtime and hours of work are adhered to. Hiring officials/supervisors and students must agree on a formally-arranged schedule of school and work so that:

(1) Work responsibilities do not interfere with academic schedule.

(2) Completion of the educational program (awarding of diploma/certificate/degree) and the Internship Program is accomplished in a reasonable and appropriate timeframe.

(3) The facility-level Pathways Programs Coordinator and hiring official are informed of and prepared for the student's periods of employment.

(4) Requirements for noncompetitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service are understood by all parties.

n. **Break in the Program.**

(1) A break in the program is defined as a period of time when an Intern is working, but is unable to go to school. It also includes a period of time when the Intern is neither attending classes nor working for the Department. With the exception of the traditional summer break or similar holiday breaks, an Intern must submit a request for break in the program to his/her supervisor for approval/disapproval. The supervisor must document the approval/disapproval and sign the request. If the supervisor grants the request, the Intern will be placed in an approved Leave without Pay (LWOP) status. If the request for LWOP is denied the Intern may choose to resign; the facility may end the Intern appointment; or the Intern may make a request with the supervisor to arrange a new work schedule.

(2) The supervisor is advised to consult with the facility-level Pathways Program Coordinator (PPC) for a technical review of the request. This will assist in ensuring that the break in program does not result in the student becoming ineligible for the Internship Program. The facility-level PPC may consult with the Administration PPO to advise on the technical implications of granting or denying the request.

o. **Training and Development.** Pathways regulations do not require a minimum number of training hours for Interns appointed without time limits (i.e., not serving on a not-to-exceed appointment). However for these Interns, supervisors are not required, but highly encouraged, to establish individual development plans (especially for those serving in career ladders) and must identify training requirements in the Participant Agreements. Supervisors must ensure that training requirements can be completed during the Intern's scheduled work hours and during the Intern's appointment.

p. **Conversion to the Competitive Service.**

(1) Hiring facilities may noncompetitively convert an Intern (indefinite or temporary) who is a U.S. citizen or national, to a term or permanent appointment in the competitive service. If the Intern is initially converted to a term position, the facility may later convert the Participant to a permanent position.

(2) In order to offer a noncompetitive conversion, the JOA must have communicated the possibility of noncompetitive conversion and other pertinent information about the permanent placement position. This pertinent information includes the occupational series, initial grade(s) of the position targeted for conversion; and any career ladder eligibility of the targeted position. Pathways positions do not lead to permanent placement to positions in the Excepted Service.

NOTE: *Conversions of temporary Interns should be rare as Interns appointed with not to exceed dates are appointed for the purpose of completing temporary projects, perform labor-intensive tasks not requiring subject matter expertise, or to fill traditional summer jobs. As with any time-limited appointment the not-to-exceed date should coincide with the anticipated ending date of the project or with the expected date of completion of the academic program. In the case that an Intern is eligible to receive a noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service, the Intern may serve up to 120 calendar days beyond the date of completion of the designated academic program. However, the not-to-exceed date may not be extended after the academic program is completed and the HR Office must plan to convert the Intern prior to the expiration date of the appointment. The appointment expires on the not-to-exceed date. If the Intern is not converted before or on the not-to-exceed date, then the appointment expires on the not-to-exceed date.*

(3) An Intern may be converted to a position within VA or another federal agency. If a VA Intern is converted in another agency, the parameters for the conversion are based on the gaining agency's policies and procedures. Facility-level PPC should consult with their respective Administration PPO prior to noncompetitively converting an Intern from another agency. Although it may not be available or provided, the facility must request the following documentation from the losing facility or agency:

(a) The original JOA to confirm if conversion eligibility was offered and to confirm targeted grade, and targeted occupation for conversion,

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- (b) The Participant Agreement,
- (c) The Individual Development Plan (if applicable), and
- (d) Performance Appraisal (if applicable)

(4) In general, to be eligible for conversion to the competitive service, the Intern must:

(a) Complete at least 640 hours of work experience acquired through the Internship Program while enrolled as a full-time or part-time, degree- or certificate-seeking student.

NOTE: *Up to 320 hours may be waived or credited as outlined in paragraphs 4r and 4s.*

(b) For Interns appointed without time limits, complete academic requirements (as determined by the educational institution), within the 120-day period preceding the appointment, at a qualifying educational institution conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree.

NOTE: *Temporary Internship appointments (i.e., with a not-to-exceed date) do not provide the 120-day conversion period. These appointments expire on the date the appointment expires.*

(c) Receive a favorable recommendation for appointment by the first line or second line supervisor for which the Intern served.

(d) Fully meet the VA or OPM qualification standards for the position to which the Intern will be converted.

(e) Fully meet any VA-specific requirements as specified in the Participant Agreement with the Intern.

(5) An Intern may be converted to a position with an established career ladder as long as the public notification identified the selectee's eligibility for noncompetitive for conversion and identified the targeted grade career ladder.

q. Conversion to the Competitive Service based on Superior Academic Achievement (S.A.A.).

(1) Upon completion of all of the requirements of the Program and a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, an Intern may be converted to a term or permanent GS-7 grade level position using the Superior Academic Achievement (S.A.A.) provision. This does not prohibit conversion at a higher grade for which the Intern is qualified for, but provides an opportunity to convert Interns at the grade level that is most advantageous for the Intern and VA. This provision is outlined in its entirety in the [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#) and covers advanced trainee positions that provide opportunities for advancement upon attaining required job skills and knowledge, require no prior experience, and have work classified at two-grade intervals. The S.A.A. provision recognizes students who have achieved superior academic standing as evidenced by one of the three methods described below. In order to be creditable under this provision, S.A.A. must have been gained in a curriculum that is qualifying for the position to be filled. S.A.A. is

based on (1) class standing, (2) Grade Point Average (G.P.A.), or (3) honor society membership. They are described as follows:

(a) **Class standing.** Individuals must be in the upper third of the graduating class in the college, university, or major subdivision, such as the College of Liberal Arts or the School of Business Administration, based on completed courses.

(b) **G.P.A.** Individuals must have a G.P.A. of:

1. **3.0 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B" or better)** as recorded on their official transcript, or as computed based on 4 years of education, or as computed based on courses completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum; or

2. **3.5 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B+" or better)** based on the average of the required courses completed in the major field or the required courses in the major field completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum.

NOTE: *The G.P.A. is to be rounded to one decimal place. For example, 2.95 will round to 3.0 and 2.94 will round to 2.9. In addition, some institutions may use a pass/fail grading system for some or all courses, these provisions are outlined in [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#).*

(c) **Election to membership in a national scholastic honor society.** Individuals may be considered eligible based on membership in one of the national scholastic honor societies listed below. These honor societies are listed in [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#).

r. Waiver of Service Requirement.

(1) VA facilities may noncompetitively convert an Intern to a term or permanent appointment by waiving up to one-half (*i.e.*, 320 hours) of the 640-hour minimum service requirement when an Intern completes 320 hours of career-related work experience under an Internship Program appointment and demonstrates high potential by outstanding academic achievement and exceptional job performance as provided in 5 CFR 362.204(d).

(2) VA facilities may not be granted a credit or waiver (or a combination of a credit and waiver) totaling more than 320 hours of the 640-hour service requirement. VA facilities must submit a request for a waiver of up to one-half of the minimum service requirement to the headquarters VA PPO.

s. Credit for Non-Federal Internship Experience. VA facilities may evaluate, consider, and grant credit for up to one-half (320 hours) of the 640-hour Pathway's Intern Program requirement for comparable non-Federal internship experience in a field or functional area directly related to the student's target position and experience acquired while the student met at least one of the following requirements:

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(1) Worked in, but not for, a Federal agency, pursuant to a formal internship agreement, comparable to the Pathway's Internship Program, between the agency and an accredited educational institution.

(2) Worked in, but not for, a Federal agency, pursuant to a written contract with a third-party internship provider officially established to provide internship experiences to students that are comparable to the VA Internship Program.

(3) Served as an active duty member of the armed forces (including the National Guard and Reserves), as defined in 5 U.S.C. 2101, provided the Veteran's discharge or release is under honorable conditions.

(4) Participated in student volunteer service, as defined in 5 CFR, part 308 and/or other Federal programs designed to give internship experience to students (e.g., fellowships and similar programs), may be evaluated, considered, and credited service when it is determined the experience is comparable to experience gained in the Pathway's Internship Program.

(5) Hiring facilities must submit requests for determination of credit for comparable experience acquired by an Intern in a non-Federal or student volunteer service program to the headquarters VA PPO for determination of credit.

t. Treatment of Third-party Interns. VA facilities may enter into arrangements with third-party Intern providers as part of their overall Intern Program recruiting strategy to have diverse pipelines by drawing candidates from all segments of society. E.O. 13562 encourages agencies to allow third-party provided Interns to participate in their Internship programs to the same extent as the Interns the agency hires itself. This means that third-party provided Interns must get the same access to training, career development, and mentoring as other VA Interns.

u. Setting Pay Upon Conversion.

(1) After completion of the Program requirements and upon conversion, the payable rate of basic pay should be set at the minimum rate of the highest applicable rate range of the position. However, the payable rate of basic pay of a newly converted Intern may be set above the minimum rate of the grade, if the Intern meets one of the following criteria:

(a) The Intern has superior qualifications based on the level, type, or quality of the Intern's skills or competencies demonstrated or obtained through experience and/or education, the quality of the candidate's accomplishments compared to others in the field, or other factors that support a superior qualifications determination. The Intern's skills, competencies, experience, education, and/or accomplishments must be relevant to the requirements of the position to be filled. These qualities must be significantly higher than that needed to be minimally required for the position for which being converted to.

(b) The Intern fills a special agency need if the type, level, or quality of skills and competencies or other qualities and experiences possessed are relevant to the requirements of the position. An Intern may also meet the special needs criteria by meeting the VA mission, goal, program activity or workforce needs, as documented in the VA's strategic human capital plan.

(2) The decision to use the superior qualifications and special needs pay-setting authority must be made prior to the conversion and approved in writing prior to the conversion date. Decisions must be made in accordance with and the manner as prescribed in VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration, Part II, Chapter 3, paragraph 4.

v. **Reduction in Force.** Interns are covered by 5 CFR, part 351 for purposes of RIF.

(1) An Intern serving under an appointment for an initial period expected to last more than 1 year is in excepted service Tenure Group II.

(2) A temporary Intern, serving under an appointment not to exceed 1 year, who has not completed 1 year of service, is in excepted service Tenure Group 0.

(3) A temporary Intern serving under an appointment not to exceed 1 year, who has completed 1 year of current, continuous service, is in excepted service Tenure Group III.

w. **Termination in Appointment.** As a condition of employment, an Intern appointment expires when one of the following circumstances occur:

(1) For an Intern appointed without limitations, the appointment ends 120 calendar days after completion of the designated academic course of study, unless the Participant is selected for noncompetitive conversion under 5 CFR 362.204.

(2) For a temporary Intern appointed with a not to exceed date, the appointment ends upon expiration of the temporary Internship appointment or when the justification of the temporary appointment is no longer supported.

(3) The date an Internship Program Participant fails to meet the eligibility requirements for the Internship Program.

5. RECENT GRADUATES PROGRAM.

a. **Program Eligibility.** A Recent Graduate is an individual who obtained a qualifying associates, bachelors, master's, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree or certificate from an accredited, qualifying educational institution, within the previous 2 years or other applicable period. An individual must meet one of the following criteria to receive consideration for eligibility requirements:

(1) Except as provided in paragraph 5(a)(2), an individual may apply for a position in the Recent Graduates Program only if the individual's application is received not later than 2 years after the date the individual completed all requirements of an academic course of study leading to a qualifying associates, bachelor's, master's, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree or certificate from an accredited, qualifying educational institution.

(2) A Veteran, as defined in 5 U.S.C. 2108, who, due to a military service obligation, was precluded from applying to the Recent Graduates Program during any portion of the 2-year eligibility period described in paragraph 5(a)(1) shall have a full 2-year period of eligibility upon his or her release or

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discharge from active duty. In no event, may the individual's eligibility period extend beyond 6 years from the date on which the individual completed the requirements of an academic course of study.

b. **Classification and Qualification.** Facilities must evaluate individuals using only OPM title 5 Qualification Standards for the occupation and grade level of the position being filled. The position must provide a career ladder with progressively more responsible duties that provide career advancement opportunities. HR Offices may not adopt or develop their own qualification standards for positions filled through the Pathways Recent Graduates Program. Candidates must fully meet the qualification requirements of the grade level and occupation for appointment.

c. **Administrative Careers With America (ACWA).**

(1) Recent Graduate positions at the GS-5 and/or GS-7 grade levels subject to the *Luevano Consent Decree* must be filled using Decree-permitted rating schedules and assessment tools. The Decree requires that Federal hiring offices use such alternate examining procedures when filling those positions, whether in the title 5 competitive or excepted service.

(2) Though it is generally not mandatory for a VA hiring facility to work through a VA Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) to fill title 5 excepted service positions, due to Administrative Careers With America (ACWA) test security requirements, a hiring facility must arrange with a VA DEU to use the Decree-permitted ACWA examinations for any Decree-covered positions. The [OPM Operating Manual for Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#) lists the Decree-covered occupations for which the ACWA examinations (or other valid assessment) are mandatory. Any other proposed assessment tool must be reviewed and approved by the Director, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service and the VA Office of General Counsel.

(3) An appropriately assigned VA Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) must administer the ACWA assessment. The process for announcing one of these positions is as follows:

(a) If the grade recruited for is at the GS-5 or GS-7 grade level and the position is targeted to the GS-9 or above, the HR Office will prepare the DEU request to indicate Recent Graduate.

(b) Job analysis and category rating definitions are not required as the ACWA assessment serves as the job analysis.

(c) The DEU Office will review the applications for qualifications and eligibility and will issue a referral certificate based on numerical scores.

(d) When making a selection using numerical scores, the facility must comply with 5 CFR 302.401, to make a selection from the three applicants with the highest scores, as long as the three applicants are still interested and available.

d. **Appointment.**

(1) Facilities may appoint a Recent Graduate for 1 year using the excepted service appointing authority provided by 5 CFR 213.3402(b). An appointment to the Recent Graduate program may be

extended for a period up to an additional 120 calendar days to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations: failure to complete the IDP in the time allotted due to administrative difficulties or other necessities of the service; or documented personal issues dealing with family death or medical obligations that would hinder program completion.

(2) OPM may approve an agency's Recent Graduate programs to have a duration up to 2 years in length, if a longer program is justified and warranted. Requests to OPM for Recent Graduate programs that extend up to 2 years must be submitted to the VA PPO.

(3) Facilities may make appointments to the Recent Graduates Program, pursuant to the Pathways MOU executed with the OPM, under Schedule D of the excepted service in accordance with 5 CFR, part 302.

(4) Facilities may make an initial appointment of a Recent Graduate to any position filled under this authority for which the Recent Graduate qualifies, up to the GS-9 grade level (or equivalent under another pay and classification system, such as the Federal Wage Grade System).

(5) Initial appointments to positions for science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) occupations may be made at the GS-11 level, if the candidate possesses a Ph.D. or equivalent degree directly related to the STEM position the HR Office is seeking to fill.

(6) Initial appointments to scientific and professional research positions at the GS-11 level for which the classification and qualification criteria for research positions apply, if the candidate possesses a master's degree or equivalent graduate degree directly related to the position the agency is seeking to fill.

(7) Initial appointments to scientific and professional research positions at the GS-12 level for which the classification and qualification criteria for research positions apply, if the candidate possesses a Ph.D. or equivalent degree directly related to the position the agency is seeking to fill.

(8) The duration of the Recent Graduate's appointment in the excepted service is a trial period.

e. Impact on Pay of Current Federal Employees.

(1) If a selectee is currently employed as a civilian in the Federal Government and his/her current rate of basic pay would otherwise be reduced as a result of placement in the Recent Graduate position, pay retention provisions under 5 CFR, part 536, subpart C, may apply in setting the pay. Pay retention applies to any employee whose rate of basic pay would otherwise be reduced (after application of any applicable geographic conversion under 5 CFR 536.303(a)) as a result of a management action that places an employee in a formal employee development program generally utilized governmentwide. The Recent Graduates Program meets the definition of a formal employee development program.

(2) An "employee" means an individual whose employment immediately prior to the appointment was on other than a temporary or term appointment. According to 5 CFR 536.103, a management action includes an employee's placement in or transfer to a position under a formal employee development program established by an agency for recruitment and employee advancement purposes is considered a

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management action even though the employee initiates or requests such placement or transfer. See VA Handbook 5007, Pay Administration, Part III, Chapter 6, for pay retention guidance.

f. Individual Development Plan (IDP), Mentorship, and Formal Training Requirements.

(1) The supervisor must ensure, within 45 calendar days of appointment, that an IDP has been developed, approved, and issued to the Recent Graduate.

(2) Within 90 calendar days of a Recent Graduate's appointment, the supervisor will assist in the assignment of a mentor, who is an appropriate employee, outside the Recent Graduate's chain of command. The mentor relationship is a formal, structured relationship and should comply with any Administration or local policies regarding mentors.

(3) The supervisor must arrange and provide for at least 40 hours of formal interactive training per year during the Recent Graduate's appointment that advances the goals and competencies outlined in her/his IDP and are related to the position. Mandatory annual training, such as information security and ethics training, does not count towards the 40-hour requirement. Interactive training includes communication between the participants and/or the instructor and this training may be provided on-line or in-person.

g. Work Schedules. Recent Graduate positions are full-time positions. Recent Graduate appointments are designed to last 1 year unless an extended program or extension is approved. A part-time work schedule or extensive leave without pay would impact a Recent Graduate Participant's ability to complete the required work and developmental assignments. Requests for part-time work schedules must be reviewed and approved by the VA PPO. In the event a part-time schedule is approved, the servicing HR Office must require the Participant to sign a statement of understanding that outlines the negative implications of changing to a part-time work schedule.

h. Movements During the Recent Graduate Program.

(1) Separation of a Recent Graduate participant to a new VA facility/station or Federal Agency.

(a) During the program, a current Recent Graduate participant may be selected for a different Recent Graduate position with another VA facility/station or another Federal agency. It is the responsibility of the Recent Graduate to ensure that the new Federal agency/department meets all the requirements (i.e., current MOU, opportunities for permanent placement, etc.) as described in 5 CFR, part 362 for participating in the Recent Graduates Program.

(b) To move to a new VA facility/station or Federal agency, an appropriate personnel action must be processed to separate the Recent Graduate from the current VA facility.

(c) The new employing VA facility/station or Federal agency must convert or appoint the Recent Graduate on a Pathways excepted appointment without a break in service. The time served under the previous Recent Graduates Program is creditable towards the new Program requirements for noncompetitive conversion eligibility to the competitive service. Because there is no break in service,

the Recent Graduate will not begin a new period in the Program upon moving to the new VA facility/station or Federal agency.

(d) The new employing VA facility/station must identify and explain to the Recent Graduate the requirements for Program completion and eligibility for noncompetitive conversion and execute a new Pathways Participant Agreement.

i. Accession of a Recent Graduate from another VA facility/station or Federal Agency.

(1) When a VA facility hires a current Recent Graduate program participant from another VA facility/station or Federal agency for a new Recent Graduate appointment, the gaining facility must convert or appoint the Recent Graduate under a Pathways excepted appointment. The gaining facility must request and verify all documentation required to appoint the Recent Graduate (i.e., transcripts); request a copy of the current appointment SF-50 (placing the Recent Graduate); and request a copy of the current Participant Agreement and IDP.

(2) The gaining VA facility/station must appoint the Recent Graduate on a Pathways excepted appointment without a break in service. The time served under the previous VA facility/station or Federal agency's Recent Graduates Program is credited toward the new Program requirements for noncompetitive conversion eligibility to the competitive service. Because there is no break in service, the Recent Graduate will not begin a new period in the Program upon moving to the gaining facility.

(3) The gaining VA facility must identify and explain to the Recent Graduate participant the requirements for Program completion and eligibility for noncompetitive conversion and execute a new Pathways Participant Agreement.

j. Conversion to the Competitive Service.

(1) Facilities may noncompetitively convert a Recent Graduate who is a U.S. citizen or national to a competitive service term or permanent position when the Recent Graduate meets all of the following requirements:

(a) Successfully completes at least 1-year of continuous service in addition to all the requirements of the Recent Graduates Program. The 1-year period allows the completion of the trial period upon conversion; therefore, no further probationary and/or trial period following conversion is required.

(b) Demonstrates successful job performance consistent with the performance appraisal program that results in a rating of record (or summary rating) of at least Fully Successful or equivalent and a recommendation for conversion by the first-level supervisor.

(c) Meets the OPM Qualification Standard for the competitive service position to which the Recent Graduate will be converted.

(2) Hiring facilities must make the noncompetitive conversion effective on the date the service requirement is met, or at the end of an approved extension, if applicable. Extensions of the program are approved by the headquarters VA PPO.

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(3) Recent Graduates may be converted to a career ladder position as long as the career ladder eligibility (i.e., target grade) was included in the original JOA.

(4) If the Recent Graduate is initially converted to a term position, the facility may later convert the Participant to a permanent position.

NOTE: *Hiring facilities may convert a Recent Graduate within VA, but may not convert a Recent Graduate from another Federal agency. In addition, converting an individual to a term position is intended to cover instances where budgets and other workforce requirements preclude a hiring official from converting an individual to a permanent position.*

k. Reduction in Force.

(1) Recent Graduates are in excepted service Tenure Group II in accordance with 5 CFR 351.502.

(2) Recent Graduate's appointment expires at the end of the Program period prescribed by the facility, plus any approved extensions, unless the Participant is selected for noncompetitive conversion under 5 CFR 362.306.

l. Termination of Appointment.

(1) As a condition of employment, a Recent Graduate appointment expires at the end of the 1-year or 2-year Program period as applicable, plus any approved extension, unless the Recent Graduate is selected for noncompetitive conversion under 5 CFR 362.306. Extensions of the program are approved by the headquarters VA PPO.

(2) A Recent Graduate who held a career-conditional or career appointment in VA immediately before entering the Program, and fails to complete the Program for reasons that are not related to misconduct, poor performance, or suitability, may, at the request of the of the Recent Graduate or supervisor, be placed noncompetitively in a permanent competitive service position, as appropriate, within VA. The position identified for noncompetitive placement must be at a grade no higher than a position the employee has held on a permanent basis in the competitive service and must not have higher known promotion potential.

6. PRESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT FELLOWS (PMF) PROGRAM. The PMF Program is a prestigious Federal program designed to attract outstanding men and women from a variety of academic disciplines and career paths who have a clear interest in, and commitment to, excellence in the leadership and management of public policies and programs in the Federal service. PMF positions are considered entry-level positions for individuals with advanced degrees. OPM administers the application process for the PMF Program. The VA PMF Coordinator and Administration PPOs oversee PMF hires in VA.

a. Establishing a Need for a PMF.

(1) PMF appointments are designed to meet workforce planning needs for leadership and management in the public service.

(2) When establishing the need for a PMF appointment, supervisors and management officials in collaboration with human resources officials, will determine the following:

(a) Determine if the use of a PMF appointment will help meet the long-term and short-term workforce needs of the organization.

(b) Determine if the facility has the resources to hire, support and fund the professional development requirements of the program.

(c) Design formal training and development plans and performance plans for PMF positions that comply with 5 CFR 362.405.

b. Eligibility. A person is eligible for consideration for the PMF if he/she meets the following criteria:

(1) An individual who, within the previous 2 years, completed an advanced degree (i.e., masters, professional, or doctorate) from a qualifying educational institution is eligible to apply for the PMF program.

(2) An individual may also apply for the PMF Program, if the individual is still a student attending a qualifying educational institution, and he/she expects to meet the advanced degree requirements (even though he/she has not graduated), including the completion or successful defense of any required thesis or dissertation, are eligible to apply. Eligibility is based on completion of degree requirements by August 31 of the following year of the annual application.

(3) An individual may apply for the PMF Program more than once as long as he/she meets the eligibility criteria. However, if an individual becomes a finalist and subsequently applies for the Program during the next open PMF announcement, the individual will forfeit his or her status as a finalist upon accessing the on-line assessment.

c. Classification. A qualified PMF may be appointed in an administrative, technical or professional two-grade interval position in the General Schedule (GS) System or the Federal Wage Grade (WG) System, at the GS-9, GS-11, or GS-12 grade level, as appropriate.

d. Announcement.

(1) OPM administers the application process for the PMF Program and conducts a competition for the selection of Finalists. OPM will make the qualification determination for PMF finalists at the GS-9 grade level.

(2) OPM selects PMF finalists based on an OPM evaluation of each candidate's experience and accomplishments according to his/her application and the results of a rigorous structured assessment process. OPM publishes and provides the PMF finalists list for appointment consideration to the VA PMF Coordinator.

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(3) Hiring facilities who service organizational entities wishing to recruit PMFs that have been certified by OPM will work with their designated facility-level PPC to arrange with the VA PMF Coordinator for the posting of a job description for PMF openings that include the grade levels for hiring and promotion potential in OPM's Talent Acquisition System.

e. Selection.

(1) OPM will send VA an unranked alphabetical list of Finalists for consideration. The list will include individual resumes and any supporting documentation of all PMF Finalists.

(2) The VA PMF Coordinator is responsible for advising selecting officials and HR Specialists on Veterans' preference in accordance with 5 CFR, part 302 to the unranked alphabetical Finalists' list to ensure that the core principles of the Program are upheld.

(3) The VA PMF Coordinator will annotate the adjudicated Veterans' preference status on the list of Finalists given to hiring officials. The following annotations will be used to indicate the Veterans' preference status of Finalists:

(a) CPS: 10-point compensable preference based on a service-connected disability of 30% or more;

(b) CP: 10-point compensable preference based on a service-connected disability of 10% or more, but less than 30%;

(c) XP: 10-point (other) preference; granted to recipients of the Purple Heart, persons with a non-compensable service-connected disability (less than 10%), widow/widower or parent of a deceased Veteran, or spouse or parent of a disabled Veteran; and

(d) TP: 5-point preference.

NOTE: *Although a sole survivorship preference (SSP) Veteran does not receive preference points, he/she is listed ahead of non-preference eligibles with the same score on an examination or ahead of non-preference eligibles under category rating procedures.*

(4) If a PMF who is a preference eligible expresses an interest in a specific PMF position, he/she must receive consideration. "Expresses an interest" means the Finalist has initiated contact with a facility or the VA PMF Coordinator and requests consideration for appointment to a specific position in VA. All contacts from interested Finalists should be directed to the VA PMF Coordinator.

(5) When multiple candidates are being considered for the same position, consideration must be given as follows: first, to preference eligibles having a service-connected disability of 10% or more; second, to other 10-point preference eligibles; third, to 5-point preference eligibles; and then to non-preference eligibles. When fewer than three candidates remain in the highest category, consideration may be expanded to include the next category.

(6) A preference eligible may only be removed from consideration if it can be demonstrated that the preference eligible is not qualified for the position or declines further consideration. When a preference.

eligible is removed from consideration for this reason, that decision must be documented in writing and provided to the VA PMF Coordinator

(7) When a Finalist list contains preference and non-preference eligibles, the hiring official must only be provided the name(s) of the preference eligible PMF finalists for consideration. The VA PMF Coordinator may provide the names of the non-preference PMF finalists after the list with the preference eligible PMF Finalists has been exhausted following proper pass over and objection requests.

(8) A hiring official is only permitted to select a non-preference eligible over a preference eligible if an appropriate objection and/or pass over request, as applicable is sustained. A request to object to or pass over a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more must be adjudicated by OPM. A request to object to or pass over a non-preference eligible or a preference eligible with a compensable service-connected disability of less than 30 percent must be adjudicated by the servicing Human Resources Officer/Director. Objection and pass over procedures based on medical and suitability reasons are described Referral and Selection Procedures, Paragraphs 3(7) and 3(8) of this appendix.

(9) Selection of a PMF for any position that is centralized to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Under Secretary for Health, Under Secretary for Benefits, or the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs requires the respective official's prior approval. (Current lists of centralized positions are available in VA Handbook 5001, General Introduction and Administration, Part II).

f. Appointment.

(1) PMFs are given 2-year appointments at the GS-9, GS-11, or GS-12 level (or equivalent under the WG), in the title 5 excepted service under 5 CFR 213.3402(c). The grade level depends on the PMF's qualifications. Hiring facilities may extend a PMF's appointment for up to 120 calendar days to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations. Extensions of the program are approved by the headquarters VA PPO.

(2) Attorney positions, GS-905, in the excepted service, are outside the PMF Program's hiring authority; therefore, PMF finalists cannot be appointed or converted into attorney positions.

g. Work Schedule. PMF positions are full-time positions. A part-time work schedule or extensive leave without pay would impact a PMF's ability to complete the required work and developmental assignments. Requests for part-time work schedules, with concurrence of the VA PMF Coordinator, may be approved under certain and/or rare circumstances.

h. Individual Development Plan (IDP), Mentorship, and Formal Training Requirements.

(1) In consultation with the VA PMF Coordinator, the supervisor must ensure, within 45 calendar days of a PMF's appointment, that he/she has developed with the PMF, an approved IDP stating the specific developmental activities on which the PMF and her/his supervisor have mutually agreed upon.

(2) Within 90 calendar days of a PMF's appointment, the supervisor will assist in the assignment of a mentor, who is an appropriate employee, outside the PMF's chain of command. The mentor relationship

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is a formal, structured relationship and should comply with any Administration or local policies regarding mentors.

(3) The supervisor must arrange and provide for at least 80 hours of formal interactive training per year during the PMF's 2-year appointment that advances the goals and competencies outlined in her/his IDP. Mandatory annual training, such as information security and ethics training, does not count towards the 80-hour requirement. Interactive training includes communication between the participants and/or the instructor and this training may be provided on-line or in-person.

(4) The hiring facility must provide each PMF with at least one rotational or developmental assignment with respect to these requirements:

(a) Each PMF must receive at least one rotational or developmental assignment of 4 to 6 months in duration, with management and/or technical responsibilities consistent with the PMF's IDP. As an alternative, a PMF may choose to participate in a VA-wide initiative or other Presidential or Administration initiative that will provide the PMF with the experience he/she would have gained through the 4-to-6-month developmental assignment; and

(b) The rotational or developmental assignment may be within the PMF's organization, in another VA component, or in another Federal department/agency. In advance of making the appointment, a VA facility that hires a PMF should discuss with the PMF the anticipated range of organizational locations where the Finalist may expect to complete a developmental rotation.

(5) The PMF may receive other short-term rotational assignments of 1 to 6 months in duration, at the facility's discretion.

(6) Upon the request of OPM, the appointing facility must make a PMF available to assist in the assessment process for subsequent PMF classes. Any interactive training provided to a PMF in connection with assisting OPM in the assessment process may count toward the minimum 80-hour training requirement.

(7) Guidance on the professional development requirements of the PMF Program will be made available to hiring facilities by the VA PMF Coordinator.

i. **Promotion.** Any PMF serving on a career ladder who meets promotion requirements in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part III, may be promoted. However, this provision does not confer an entitlement to a promotion.

j. **Certification of Completion of Program.**

(1) Upon completion of the PMF Program, the facility-level PPC should notify the Administration PPO. The VA PMF Coordinator will review and facilitate the certification request to the VA Executive Resources Board (ERB). In addition, the PMF must be evaluated by the VA ERB to determine whether it can certify in writing that the PMF has met all of the requirements of the Program, including the performance and developmental expectations set forth in the performance plan and IDP. The VA ERB may consult the PMF's mentor in reaching its determination.

(2) The VA ERB must notify the PMF of its decision regarding certification of successful completion and the ERB certification must be forwarded to OPM.

(3) If the VA ERB decides not to certify a PMF, the PMF may request reconsideration of that determination from the OPM Director. Such reconsideration must be requested in writing, with appropriate documentation and justification, within 15 calendar days of the date of the decision by the VA ERB.

(4) The final decision on reconsideration by the OPM Director is not subject to appeal.

(5) The PMF may continue in the Program pending the outcome of the request for reconsideration. The agency must continue to provide appropriate developmental activities during this period.

k. **Extension of Program.** A PMF must complete the Program within the 2-year time limit prescribed, including any approved extensions. VA may extend a PMF's appointment for up to 120 calendar days to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations, such as the PMF being unable to complete the IDP in the time allotted due to administrative difficulties or other necessities of the service, or officially documented personal issues dealing with family death or medical obligations that would hinder program completion. Extensions of the program are approved by the headquarters VA PPO.

l. **Conversion to the Competitive Service.** A PMF must complete the Program within the time limits prescribed 5 CFR 362.409, including any approved extensions. At the conclusion of that period, an ERB-certified PMF that did not have a break in service may be converted to a competitive service term or permanent appointment. Converting a PMF to a term position is intended to cover instances where budgets and other workforce requirements preclude a hiring official from converting an individual to a permanent position. PMF's initially converted to a term position, the facility may later convert the Participant to a permanent position. VA HR Offices may not convert PMF's from other Federal agencies.

m. **Reduction in Force.** PMFs are in the excepted service Tenure Group II for purposes of the order of retention for excepted service. (See 5 CFR 351.502).

n. **Termination of Appointment.**

(1) A PMF may be terminated for reasons related to misconduct, poor performance, or suitability.

(2) As a condition of employment, a PMF's appointment expires at the end of the 2-year Program period, plus any approved extension, unless the PMF is selected for noncompetitive conversion. If a facility does not convert a PMF at the end of the Program, as provided in 5 CFR 362.409, or extend the individual's initial appointment under 5 CFR 362.404, the appointment expires when certification (or appeal) for Program completion is denied by the OPM Director. Extensions of the program are approved by the headquarters VA PPO.

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(3) A PMF who held a career-conditional or career appointment in VA immediately before entering the Program, and fails to complete the Program for reasons that are not related to misconduct, poor performance, or suitability, may, at the request of the of the PMF or supervisor, be placed noncompetitively in a permanent competitive service position, as appropriate, within VA. The position identified for noncompetitive placement must be at a grade no higher than a position the employee has held on a permanent basis in the competitive service and must not have higher known promotion potential.

(4) HR Offices must provide written notification to OPM through the headquarters VA PPO and the VA PMF Coordinator when a PMF is terminated for any reason.]

the next higher grade is not guaranteed and depends on: (a) the selectee's demonstration of the ability to perform the duties of the next higher grade to the satisfaction of the supervisor; and (b) the availability of enough work at the next higher grade. Meeting the minimum qualification requirements and time-in-grade requirements for a higher grade in a career ladder is, of itself, only an indicator of eligibility, not an absolute guarantee for such a promotion.

(3) **Apprentice Position. Requirement** - When an employee has been properly selected for the initial grade level as described above, a career-ladder promotion of an apprentice in a trade or craft may be made through intermediate grades (if appropriate) to the target grade level.

(4) **Trainee Position. Requirement** - A properly selected trainee may receive career-ladder promotions through intermediate grades as each phase of training is satisfactorily completed and to the target grade level when the entire training program is satisfactorily completed.

(5) **Understudy Position. Requirement** - Occasionally, an understudy position is established to train a person for a position which is to be vacated at a future date. When properly selected for an understudy position, the selectee may receive a career-ladder promotion without additional competition to the target position when it is vacated. **Guidance** - Normally, the understudy position is established within 1 year or less of the anticipated vacancy.

(6) **Position Filled at a Grade Below the Established or Anticipated Grade. Requirement** - A career-ladder promotion may be made of an employee in a position which was properly filled at a grade below the established or anticipated grade.

(7) **Training or Executive Development Agreements. Requirement** - An employee, properly selected through competition as described previously, may receive a career-ladder promotion upon satisfactory completion of an approved training agreement or executive development agreement which specifically provides for the promotion.

(8) **Details for Training or Evaluation. Requirement** - An employee properly selected for a training or evaluation detail to a higher grade position or to one with known promotion potential may receive a career-ladder promotion if the fact that the detail could lead to promotion was made known to all potential candidates for the initial detail.

(9) **Veterans Recruitment Appointee. (5 CFR 307.103) Requirement** - When a Veterans Recruitment Appointment is made to a position with known promotion potential, subsequent career-ladder promotions may be made through intermediate grades (if appropriate) to the target grade level.

(10) **Others. Requirement** - When employees serving under the following types of appointments have satisfied the specified criteria of the appointment authority and are properly converted to career or career-conditional appointment in the competitive service in positions with known promotion potential, career-ladder promotions may be made through intermediate grades (if applicable) to the target grade level:

(a) [Pathways Programs which includes the Internship Program, Recent Graduates Program and Presidential Management Fellows Program (5 CFR 213.3402 (a), (b), and (c))];

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(b) Service disabled Veterans (5 CFR 315.604);

(c) Service disabled Veterans (30 percent or more) (5 CFR 315.707); [and]

(d) Employees with intellectual disabilities, severe physical disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities (5 CFR 315.709);

[]

d. Career Promotion of an Employee Whose Position Is Reconstituted to a Higher Grade.

(1) **Requirement** - An employee whose position is reconstituted to a higher grade because of the accretion of additional duties and responsibilities may receive a career promotion.

NOTE: *The basic function of the original position must continue to be a part of the new one.*

(2) **Guidance** - Employees serving on identical-additional position descriptions are supposed to perform identical duties. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that subordinates perform described duties. To single out one of several such employees for this type of career promotion may, therefore, be interpreted by others to be an act of personal favoritism. Any action of this nature should occur only after careful consideration and sufficient justification.

(3) **Guidance** - There may be times when circumstances require the assignment of additional duties and responsibilities to a position which will result in a promotion and competition is not practical. Some examples are:

(a) A higher-level management decision results in a change in workload, technology, procedures or organization and provides for no increase in ceiling. The decision results in a need for a higher grade job to accomplish the assigned tasks. Only one of the employees in the affected unit, which is at ceiling, can qualify for the job;

(b) An increase in technology results in the purchase of new equipment for a line of work requiring an increase in the level of duties and responsibilities for those who will operate it. The employees will continue to perform the same basic function but at a higher level required by the new equipment;

(c) Additional personnel are assigned to an organization which results in a supervisor's position being upgraded;

(d) Additional responsibilities are imposed by law, rule, regulation or policy. To carry out the mandate, new duties must be added to a position in a unit and only one position provides the knowledges, skills or abilities necessary for satisfactory performance in the new job; or

(e) An employee performs a job in such an exemplary manner that other key employees outside the unit gradually come to rely on that person to such an extent, and involving such complicated issues, that eventually the employee is performing duties which are properly classified at a higher grade.

APPENDIX B. TIME-IN-GRADE RESTRICTIONS
(TITLE 5 – 5 CFR, PART 300, SUBPART F)

1. PURPOSE. This appendix contains current VA policy on time-in-grade (TIG) restrictions for promotions to General Schedule positions in both the competitive and excepted service.

2. APPLICABILITY OF TIME-IN-GRADE RESTRICTIONS. The provisions of the TIG restrictions as set forth in 5 CFR, part 300, subpart F, govern advancement to General Schedule positions in the competitive service only. In VA, however, these regulations have been extended to advancement to excepted service positions that are subject to the General Schedule. Although the TIG restrictions are not applicable to positions outside the General Schedule (e.g., wage system jobs); noncompetitive actions in wage system jobs or between wage system jobs and General Schedule positions must be consistent with competitive merit principles even in the absence of specific controls or restrictions on excessively rapid promotions. 5 CFR 330.501 provides instructions on the Office of Personnel Management's separate but related time-after-competitive appointment requirement.

3. GENERAL RESTRICTIONS. The application of the general restrictions will be as outlined in 5 CFR 300.602 and 300.604.

4. VA EXCEPTIONS TO TIME-IN-GRADE RESTRICTIONS. In addition to TIG exceptions listed in 5 CFR 300.603, the following conditions are applied in VA:

a. **Persons Within Reach on a Register.** The TIG restrictions do not apply to persons who are within reach on an appropriate register maintained by a VA Excepted Board of Examiners for an excepted service position provided that all other statutory and regulatory requirements are met.

b. **Promotions in Accordance With a Training Agreement.** Employees who are being promoted under the terms of a training agreement which provides for an exception to normal TIG restrictions because of an accelerated rate of training are not subject to the TIG restrictions. Such agreements will be approved by the Administration or Staff Office Head subject to concurrence by the Office of Human Resources Management and Labor Relations, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059). However, an employee may not be promoted more than two grades in 1 year solely on the basis of a training agreement or a series of training agreements.

c. **[Pathways Programs.** Employees serving in Pathways Programs appointments are not subject to normal TIG restrictions, as permitted by 5 CFR 362.204. Promotions must be made using the procedures of VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix N.]

5. AUTHORITY TO WAIVE TIME-IN-GRADE RESTRICTIONS. The Secretary may waive TIG restrictions for competitive and excepted service positions for advancements of not more than three grades during any 1 service year to avoid undue hardship or inequity in an individual case of a meritorious nature. Requests for such waivers should be submitted as outlined in paragraph 6[.]

APPENDIX A.
TITLE 5 SELECTION REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED BY THE
REEMPLOYMENT PRIORITY LIST, VA CAREER TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PLAN
AND INTERAGENCY CAREER TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PLAN

1. ORDER OF SELECTION AND CONSIDERATION. The following is to be used when filling a competitive service vacancy under the [RPL, (5 CFR, part 330, subpart B), CTAP, (5 CFR, part 330, subpart F), and the ICTAP, (5 CFR, part 330, subpart G)].

- a. Selection of a displaced or surplus VA employee in the local commuting area, who applies within the prescribed timeframe for a vacancy at the same or lower grade with the same promotion potential and is determined to be well-qualified, then;
- b. Consideration of a qualified employee from within the facility under the Priority Placement Program (PPP) For Employees in Retained Grade or Pay Status (see appendix III-F of this handbook) and any facility-wide special placement programs, then;
- c. Consideration of qualified RPL registrants in the local commuting area, then;
- d. Selection of any qualified current VA employee from within or outside of the facility, then;
- e. Selection of a current or former well-qualified displaced Federal employee from another agency in the local commuting area who applies within the prescribed timeframe under the ICTAP, then;
- f. Selection of any other candidate from outside of the agency, including selection from a Federal certificate of eligibles, a reinstatement eligible, a transfer from another agency, a noncompetitive appointment,[] or any other routine competitive staffing action.

2. SELECTION ACTIONS OF VA EMPLOYEES NOT RESTRICTED BY 5 CFR, PART 330, SUBPART F.

- a. Placement of an agency employee through reassignment, change to lower grade, or promotion when no employees eligible under 5 CFR, part 330, subpart F apply;
- b. Reemployment of a former agency employee exercising regulatory or statutory reemployment rights;
- c. Position changes resulting from disciplinary actions;
- d. Temporary appointments of under 121 days (including extensions);
- e. Exchange of positions between or among agency employees, when the actions involve no increase in grade or promotion potential.

